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**Justice and Identity:
The 'Non-Jewish Jew',
Cosmopolitanism and Anti-Apartheid
Activism in Twentieth Century South
Africa**

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the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy (MPhil)** in **Justice and
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DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

Justice and Identity: The ‘Non-Jewish Jew’, Cosmopolitanism and Anti-Apartheid Activism in Twentieth Century South Africa

Throughout history, Jewry has encompassed a number of radical individuals who sought to overturn the corrupt status quo. From the times of the Jewish Prophets to modernity, Jews have given shape to a tradition of radicalism. This study explores ideas of justice in the Jewish tradition, *tzedakah* (charity) and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), and asks whether these notions informed radical Jews in South Africa in their opposition to racism and apartheid.

It is argued that with the coming of modernity secular ideas replaced religious ideas against the background of the Jewish emancipation. However, Jewish radicals were still informed by the humanist values of justice in Judaism. These Jews secularised and universalised the concepts of justice in the Jewish tradition into a modern key, employing radical ideologies such as Marxism which sought to establish a utopian messianism.

In this way, a phenomenon termed by Isaac Deutcher as the ‘Non-Jewish Jew’ was born: radical Jews who were of Jewry but not in it; Jews who found the narrow confines of Judaism too restricting and moved beyond it.

This dissertation endeavours to illustrate, through the use of memoir literature and interview material, the ways in which this legacy of radical ‘Jewishness’ played itself out in the lives of the Jewish radicals of South Africa who were immersed in the anti-apartheid struggle. Emerging from a religious childhood, these Jews grew up in the radical hotbed of Jewish socialism of Eastern Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. They all had a very strong sense of ‘Jewishness’ and explicitly linked their motivation to resist discrimination in South Africa to the values of justice in Judaism and the historical memory of the suffering of their parents and grandparents. Together with a heightened sensitivity to the suffering of others, the sense of ‘Jewishness’ of these activists embodied

a deep cosmopolitanism which saw their concerns extend beyond Jewry to the underdog in South Africa and the world.

With this cosmopolitan radicalism emerged an ambiguous view on Zionism and Israel.

As radicals, these Jews were opposed to ethnic particularism and nationalism.

Subsequently they have tended to side with the Palestinian cause rather than feel sympathy for the Jewish state.

Alana Frances Pugh-Jones

Cape Town, February 2008

University of Cape Town

Dedication and Acknowledgements

To my parents, for their love, patience and guidance ...

The journey I have undertaken in completing this thesis would not have been the deeply revealing and remarkable experience that it was without the dedicated guidance and assistance of my supervisor, Professor Milton Shain. A great mind and a true gentleman, Professor Shain works to a standard all his own and allowed me to articulate ideas and explore subjects in my writing that I would not have been able to do alone. Very rarely in life does one come across a teacher who will have a lasting influence over the way in which one views the world and expresses themselves. Professor Shain is such a teacher and I am honoured to have had the opportunity to learn from him.

I also wish to give special acknowledge and thanks to Janine Blumberg and Veronica Belling of the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, who as Head of Administration and Librarian of the Jewish Studies Library respectively, gave unselfishly and enthusiastically of their time, advice and support to me on a wide variety of matters and issues.

Professor Andre Du Toit has been an invaluable source of encouragement and knowledge on the field of Justice and Transformation, and I wish to extend my gratitude to the Political Studies Department for their support. This thesis would not have been possible without the generous financial assistance of the National Research Foundation, who graciously awarded me a Prestigious Masters Scholarship; the Postgraduate Funding Office and the Siri Johnson Bursary, and finally the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research who kindly granted me a research bursary.

I would also like to mention my family, for without their sacrifice I would not have been afforded the immense privilege of a postgraduate education. It is from your example that I wish to shape my life.

Finally, I wish to recognize the ground-breaking and powerful efforts of the radicals whose lives are examined in this dissertation. May their achievements and goals live on to inspire a new generation of revolutionaries.

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Chapter One

*“Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and they that return of her
with her of righteousness” Isaiah 1: 27¹*

¹ *Isaiah 1: 27*. Found at: http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/464022/jewish/Isaiahs-Prophecies.htm, accessed on 21/02 07

Introduction

Stretching back into history from the moment Moses raised his hand against the oppressive Egyptian overseer and miraculously parted the Red Sea and led his people from slavery into freedom; to the instant that Abraham smashed the morally bankrupt idols of his day and opened his home to the stranger; through the modern revolutionary ideas of Marx and Freud and beyond, Jewish radicalism has emerged as a profoundly powerful force that has weaved itself through events and epochs. By drawing on the great humanist and cosmopolitan notions of identity and justice within Judaism, a radical Jewish ideology and worldview has formed a tradition within a tradition. Profoundly motivated by the historical memory of the suffering of their own people throughout the ages, Jewish radicals have eternally sought to overturn the corrupt status quo of the day and transform humankind's structures of thought.

One such target for reform was the apartheid regime, which oppressed millions of black people based solely on their race and ensured a configuration of power that safeguarded the privileges of a small white minority. Although they did enjoy the fruits of an apartheid economy, a disproportionate number of Jews played a role, either within the system as members of parliament and civil society or illegally through banned organisations, in fighting for a more just South Africa.² In particular, many Jewish radicals stood up against discrimination and injustice, and dedicated their lives to the fight for an equal nation.

Historiography

Employing Isaac Deutscher's notion of the 'non-Jewish Jew' who transcends Jewry, the objective of this dissertation will be to attempt to trace and identify the changing intellectual patterns and paradigms operating among South African Jewish radicals in the anti-apartheid struggle, focusing in particular on activists' notions of their own political

² I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain – Interviews with South African Jewish Activists*. (South Africa: Viking), pg. 2

identity and influences operating on their activism. By employing the use of primary sources as well as a variety of secondary material, especially memoir literature and interviews, an attempt will be made to explore the influence of 'Jewishness' and Jewish notions of justice upon the lives of these radicals.

The historiography of radical Jews in South Africa is not the historiography of white settlers, nor is it the history of the oppressed peoples of South Africa. Yet in many ways it overlaps with both and therefore slips through the cracks. Recently, collections of interviews have been published as the number of those in the immigrant generation of radical politics begins to decline. The most influential of these is Immanuel Suttner's *Cutting Through the Mountain*, which is described as a "collection of portraits".³ Suttner and others have attempted to 'recanonicalise' those Jews whose contribution have gone unnoticed and whose life stories were censored by the state and their own community. Personal testimony is indeed a channel through which history may be recovered, and occupies an integral part of South Africa's healing process, embodied in initiatives such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Today our traditions of historiography have shifted from those of totalising histories to that of a personalized history, one that was often silenced and marginalised in the past. Now politically oriented writing can focus on those who make history on a day to day basis and provide a counter-memory to official records.⁴ The nation-building project of the new South Africa requires that all historical identities, once distorted by apartheid, must again be expressed.

In order to assess the role of Jewish identity and notions of justice on radicalism, one must delve into the realm of social history in which individuals, studied in a particular context, are used as a means of exploring a broad range of historical issues.⁵ This style of historical analysis may be either biographical or autobiographical, with this dissertation relying primarily on latter.

³ Immanuel Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, drawing on cover commentary

⁴ Maya Ruth Scholtz. (1999). *Mervyn Susser and Zena Stein: Pioneers in Community Health and their Jewish identity as an orienting factor in their contribution* (Durban: University of Natal Press), pg. 5

⁵ M. R. Scholtz. (1999). *Mervyn Susser and Zena Stein*, pg. 2

Whilst autobiography may be more discerning than biography, both types of writing are often teleological and employ narrative to make sense of the transformation of life in a country undergoing transition. Tom Lodge warns against the drawback of writing memory in retrospect, for in 'reading history backwards' one may give significance to beliefs or motives at an earlier stage than they were first held.⁶ Narrative primary sources present the lives of each Jewish radical against the backdrop of their times, and the social histories that are included in this dissertation will give one a more personal account of the continuities and discontinuities of identity and an obligation to justice that lived itself out through the lives of Jewish radicals.

History is always less than the past and autobiography records the imbalance of histories. History, like truth, is linked to power. As Suttner notes, "When a new order emerges after a long period of struggle, there is often a tendency for it rapidly to become the new orthodoxy. People who notice faults and flaws in the new order are silenced with the accusation that they are agents of the old. The iconoclasts in this book refuse to keep quiet while they saw injustices around them. There will be no less need for such iconoclasts and boat-rockers in the renewed South Africa".⁷ South African historians have a role in creating a unified yet multicultural historical memory utilising 'history from below'. This dissertation is a humble attempt to contribute to the writing of radical Jewish South African history.

Identity

"Identity as inheritance, identity as construction, identity as memory, identity as biology".⁸ 'Jewishness', like all social identities, is a symbiotic phenomenon that is in constant flux. It is a self-reproducing process that is continuously transforming itself from one moment and context to the next through various interactions between, and the

⁶ T. Lodge. (1993) 'Foreword' in Hirson, B. *Revolutions in My Life* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press), pg. xvii

⁷ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 4

⁸ Ibid. pg. 619

meeting of, various ideologies and socio-economic circumstances.⁹ Whilst Jewish religious law or *halacha* defines a Jew as one born to a Jewish mother, in a broader context, socially and politically Jewish identity is more nuanced.

Identity through matrilineal descent or ‘being a Jew’ differs from personally choosing to assert one’s ‘Jewishness’, an act of linking the self to a form of social affirmation.¹⁰ “To be Jewish is ... to have a sense of belonging, to share a history with others (which one does precisely as a member of a group), or to participate in the group’s forms of life. Denying this common past is tantamount to denying a shared culture”.¹¹ One is therefore Jewish in the cultural sense if they assume this tradition of expression, and if they “identify *with* it, identify themselves *through* it”.¹² This identity is built up by knowledge of certain experiences, psychological and social contexts, and their associated feelings. Wistrich writes that: “Jews are a people with an uncommon sense of vocation and purpose, a messianic belief in the validity of their own tradition and their monotheistic uniqueness”.¹³

It may therefore be ascertained that no singular conception of ‘Jewishness’, no overarching set of beliefs or meta-narrative of culture, exists but rather that ‘Jewishness’ lives in the intersection and tension between personal and cultural identity. “Culture is what gives one humanity”, writes Eddy Zemach, and through their history of suffering Jews have felt obliged to sustain their traditions so as not to grant forces of discrimination and oppression any victory.¹⁴

⁹ D. Goldberg and M. Krausz. (1993). ‘Introduction: The Culture of Identity’ in (ed.) Goldberg, D. and Krause, M. (1993) *Jewish Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), pg. 1

¹⁰ D. Goldberg and M. Krausz. (1993). ‘Introduction: The Culture of Identity’, pg. 6

¹¹ Ibid, pg. 7

¹² Ibid, pg. 5-6

¹³ M. Berkowitz. (1998). ‘Robert S. Wistrich and European Jewish History: Straddling the Public and Private Spheres’ in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 70, No. 1, March. Found at: www.jstor.org, accessed on 01/ 03/ 07, pg. 121

¹⁴ D. Goldberg and M. Krausz. (1993). ‘Introduction: The Culture of Identity’, pg. 11

Chapter Two

“Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may live, and inherit the land which the Lord your God gives you” Shoftim, 20: 16

Justice in the Jewish Tradition

Justice in Judaism

There can be little doubt that the teachings of Judaism place great emphasis on justice. Judaism incorporates a set of values which seeks and purports to defend the human spirit, its freedom and creativity, and create a system of order which fosters a harmonious society.¹⁵ The ‘Vulnerability Principle’ is a connective thread running throughout Jewish law and, by seeking to eliminate the injustices of the law of nature and society, reveals Judaism’s protection of the defenceless majority of humankind.¹⁶ The writings of the prophets of Jewish history hold all members of society accountable for the injustices perpetrated against the stranger; widow; and orphan, all of whom symbolise the powerless in society. The mitzvot or commandments of the Torah exhort one, in the words of Isaiah, to “‘Learn to do good, seek justice, vindicate the victim, render justice to the orphan, take up the grievance of the widow’”.¹⁷ The call to uphold and implement justice is the uppermost moral virtue echoed throughout Jewish religious texts.

A hallmark of the Jewish tradition from its origins has been the ceaseless struggle for justice.¹⁸ There are two distinct pillars to the essential notion of justice in Judaism: *tzedakah* (charity) and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). The philosophy surrounding these concepts is unique in their universal relevance and forms the basis of a humanist tradition within Judaism that breeds sympathy for the underdog. These concepts are explored here for their power and lasting influence over Jewish thought and action throughout the ages into the modern realm.

¹⁵ See, W. Goldstein, (2006). *Defending the Human Spirit: Jewish Law’s Vision for a Moral Society* (Israel: Feldheim Publishers). drawing on page 8

¹⁶ W. Goldstein, (2006). *Defending the Human Spirit*, drawing on page 8

¹⁷ Ibid, pg. 17

¹⁸ M. Becher, (2005). *Gateway to Judaism: The What, How, and Why of Jewish Life* (USA: Shaar Press), pg. 356

The Hebrew word *tzedakah* has the word *tzedek* as its root, meaning justice or righteousness.¹⁹ In Judaism, charity and righteousness are not merely above and beyond the call of duty; they are indeed fulfilling the demands of justice. The concept of *tzedakah* is mentioned in numerous sections of the Torah, such as in Proverbs 21: 3, “To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice”.²⁰ The call for justice in Judaism is stated most explicitly in the Torah portion *Shoftim* (Judges). “Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may live, and inherit the land which the Lord your God gives you” *Shoftim*, 20: 16.²¹

The Jewish ideal of social action and social justice is also expressed in the Hebrew word *Tikkun Olam*, or ‘repairing the world’. Originating in the rabbinic tradition of the sixteenth century kabbalist Luria, the principle of *tikkun olam* has been seen throughout history as integral to Jewish programmes of social action. The kabbalistic idea of *tikkun* represents the idea that the world is profoundly broken and can be fixed only by human activity.²² Judaism is an experiential religion, and places merit not in dogma or ideas, but in actions.

Jewish law and its related social ethics are often drawn from events in Jewish history, making historical moments an important text for Jewish legal principles. Events such as the Exodus from Egypt therefore have a special significance, and in the command to remember them is inculcated an extraordinary sensitivity towards the plight of the oppressed and suffering. It is arguable that this historical memory has a long history of influencing the Jewish notion of justice, which is inextricably linked to the history of Jewish social activism. With the arrival of modernity, the vestigial impact of universal and humanist ideas of *tzedakah* and *tikkun olam*, so fundamental to a Jewish conception of justice, persisted, albeit transformed into a secular guise. Justice in the Jewish tradition therefore continued to inform the radical activism of secular Jewish thinkers.

¹⁹ M. Becher. (2005). *Gateway to Judaism*, pg. 357

²⁰ *Isaiah*: 27. Found at: www.chabad.org, accessed on 21/02 07

²¹ Cited in A. Kahn. (2000). ‘Shoftim: Justice Justice’. Found at: http://www.aish.com/torahportion/moray/Justice3_Justice.asp, accessed 27/ 11/ 06

²² *Ibid*

Modernity and Radicalism

From Biblical times the Jewish tradition has encompassed within its ranks the history of a small but disproportionately influential number of revolutionaries and radicals who employed the humanistic and cosmopolitan Jewish values of justice as a base upon which they built a worldview that challenged the status quo.²³ As we move towards modernity in the eighteenth century, religious teaching gradually eroded at the expense of secular currents of thought. The latter increasingly informed Jewish intellectual life as emancipated Jewry began to bask in the sunlight of reason. During this period, Jewish radicals rebelled not just against the unsympathetic gentile world which resentfully gave them citizenship rights or no rights at all, but also from the stifling grip of ghetto life.²⁴

It had previously been within these ghettos that Jewish society had produced its own intellectuals, men who studied in the service of the Torah and who had sharp critical faculties that possessed both destructive and constructive power.²⁵ Given that liberal ideas had underpinned the Emancipation project, and given the reality of alienation felt by Jews newly emerged from the ghettos into the gentile world, many Jewish thinkers shed the outward symbols of Judaism and embraced a radical, universal worldview through which they could navigate modernity and secure a position within the wider gentile society. With the Emancipation, the Jewish world released many of these intellectuals into the secular world, heralding an event that Paul Johnson believes was of “shattering importance in world history”.²⁶

In the process of assimilation, many of these radical Jews often faced the wrath of their co-religionists. Even though they were divorced from the foundations of the Jewish tradition, it will be argued that their ‘historical memory’ came to form part of a lasting Jewish impact on these figures. This was evident through their recollections of the

²³ Within Judaism, many scholars see two contradictory traditions working simultaneously – a particularist exclusivity and a universal cosmopolitanism. See, S. Lundgren, (2001). *Particularism and Universalism in Modern Jewish Thought* (New York: Academic Studies in the History of Judaism Global Publications). Radical Jewry would fit into the cosmopolitan tradition that exists within Judaism.

²⁴ P. Johnson, (1987). *A History of the Jews* (Great Britain: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), pg. 340

²⁵ P. Johnson, (1987). *A History of the Jews*, pg. 340

²⁶ Ibid, pg. 341

Yiddish spoken by their parents; or the networks of Ashkenazi relatives that diffused the particular ancient Jewish fears and interpersonal relationships of that community and its culture.²⁷ Immanuel Suttner argues that this was internalised in their “questioning and in their analytical ability, in their drivenness, in their desire to programmatically implement basic institutions about justice, in the food, music and humour they liked, in their professional aspirations and family dynamics”.²⁸ These radicals therefore were very much a part of the Jewish tradition.

As Jews emerged from the seclusion of the ghettos into the wider communities, many took up a transformative role as cultural and political revolutionaries and overturned existing monopolies of thought.²⁹ By spanning various worlds, the Jewish radical was able to break free from the shackles of the ghetto mentality and appropriate the language of the modern world to continue the Jewish tradition into the post-Enlightenment era.³⁰

In this way, the utopian views of these Jewish radicals were a secularization of the Jewish values of *tzedakah* and *tikkun olam*. Marxism, it has been argued, is a secularized form of messianism.³¹ Its concerns with social justice and the struggle of the oppressed is rooted firmly in the Jewish notions of justice and repairing the world. “In the Jewish demand for action as the benchmark by which the individual is measured can be found the direct

²⁷ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 601

²⁸ Ibid, pg. 601

²⁹ The impact of the Emancipation on Jewry, and the subsequent failure of its promise to Jews for socio-political and economic equality as citizens in a secular nation-state, is seen by many historians as the reason for modern Jewish radicalism. The argument of the ‘Ordeal of Civility’, a phrase coined by John M. Cuddihy to describe the shock of Emancipation experienced by Jews, is a viewpoint expounded upon by Ferdinand Mount as the confrontation between the traditional Jewish world and the modern secular paradigm. From this perspective, it was the impact of the Emancipation and its clinical world of the Capitalist ethic that made some Jews create revolutionary ‘structures of thought’ that would overturn the status quo of the times.

³⁰ For Cuddihy, revolutionary structures of thought of post-emancipation Jewish origin have a double audience, addressing the Jews in order to bring about their reform as well as the gentile world as a way of apology for, and defence of, Jewry. Radical ideologies created by Jewish intellectuals can be seen as ideologies of redemption in the modern world. Cuddihy sees Jewish thought on ‘dedifferentiation’ as transforming the struggles faced by newly emancipated Jewry into ‘scientific problems’, thereby making Jewry less disreputable. This phenomenon created a disproportionate number of radical Jews who were the modern symbols of a legacy extending back to the time of the Hebrew prophets, who criticised the world around them and sought to bring about a perfected future for humankind.

³¹ See, I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain* and ‘The Passion of the Jews’ (1975) in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4, Summer. Found at: www.jstor.org, accessed on 21/ 09/ 06

predecessor of the Marxist formulation that ‘The purpose of philosophy is not to interpret the world but to change it’³². A disproportionate number of Jews are drawn to radical movements in their search for a modern manifestation of the ancient Jewish longing for the messianic utopia. Marxism is therefore the secularization of the Jewish humanist tradition, a universalized religious position where all enjoy the same inalienable rights – attached to the Jewish belief in the sanctity and value of human life but extending these ideas beyond Jewish particularism.³³

Historical awareness of dehumanisation is another aspect of the Jewish tradition which may be the fertile soil in which the conviction that prejudices should be challenged was bred. “And their knowledge of themselves as the heirs to a messy, painful and ongoing history of being the devalued ‘other’”, Suttner argues, “made the new dichotomies of communism, like working class and owning class, seem full of hope and possibility”.³⁴ Racism, especially with the rise of ‘scientific racism’ in the late eighteenth century that located race in inherently biological factors, could then be escaped if it was placed in light of something that could be overturned, such as economic greed. Socialist ideologies held the promise of a better future, and offered an escape from ‘Jewishness’ into a universalistic paradigm without the disloyalty of conversion. By freeing themselves from communal dogmas, and seeking out a modern, rational basis of human continuity and identity, Jewish activists became bound to a radicalism that secularized Jewish notions of *tzedakah* and *tikkun olam*. This view has been explored by many authors and holds much sway in the historiography of Jewish radicals.³⁵

A different form of secularization of Jewish values is also evident in the secularization of interpretations of Jewish history in the twentieth century. Modernity brought with it the

³² I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 604

³³ Ibid, pg. 605

³⁴ Ibid, pg. 601

³⁵ The rise of Jewish socialist movements may also be highlighted as a continuous thread of the Jewish tradition – not only as the heir to the Jewish religious notions of social activism and justice, but to the Jewish tradition of poverty and ‘outsider’ status in the Diaspora. Both these forces can be seen to have united and created the growth of Jewish radical movements and attest to its influence of the Jewish tradition. See, I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain* and E. Mendelsohn, (1997). ‘Introduction’ in *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left* (USA: New York University Press)

effects of economic redistribution, acculturation, and religious and educational reforms.³⁶ Through this process a new historical consciousness began to emerge and exert an important influence in the creation of a modern Jewish identity.³⁷ A shift in the relation of Jews to their history resulted and this new conception was used as a model from which radical Jews could mould their social activism. The stories and figures of justice in the Torah were appropriated as figures of morality and justice in the modern world – the Jewish conception of justice was thus secularized in this process. Jewish intellectuals in the last century wrote of the ‘prophetic tradition’ as influencing Jewish political work, which they identified with their own conception of their role as intellectuals. These radical Jews drew on the historical role of Jews as champions of universal justice, even though these concepts of justice were acknowledged to be the common assets of all mankind in modern times.³⁸

Radical Jews, however universal and opposed to nationalism in their Marxist views, were therefore still in some way Jewish in various aspects of their lives. The dislocation of Jews in society, the historical memory of prejudice against the Jewish people and their sympathy for the underdog as rooted in Jewish values of justice, propelled many Jewish radical intellectuals to seek groundbreaking and ‘universalising’ theories. These Marxian ideas echoed many of the values within Judaism to create an ideology of equality which stressed a shared humanity, such as *tikkun olam*, *gemilut chasadim* and *tzedakah*.³⁹ Transforming the values and virtues of the Jewish tradition into a modern key, and fostered by the history of Jews as ‘outsiders’ to Western civilization, the ideologies

³⁶ M. Meyer. (1988). ‘The Emergence of Jewish Historiography: Motives and Motifs’ in *History and Theory*, Vol. 27, No. 1, Beiheft 27: Essays in Jewish Historiography, December. Found at: www.jstor.org, accessed on 17/ 03/ 07, pg. 160

³⁷ M. Meyer. (1988). ‘The Emergence of Jewish Historiography: Motives and Motifs’, pg. 160

³⁸ J. Rosenblum. (2007). ‘Hostile to Israel’. Found at:

www.aish.com/societyWork/society/Hostile_to_Israel.asp, accessed on 18/ 03/ 07

³⁹ According to Mount, being born on the fringe of a great culture, a ‘borderline case’ in one sense or another; showing contempt for particularistic patriotism; and an ancestry of ‘borderers’, are all factors that most revolutionaries have in common. These assertions aptly describe the location of Jews in society throughout the ages and may well explain why Jews are disproportionately represented on the left and how the Jewish tradition informed Jewish radicals.

created from the impact of Emancipation sought a humanized, universal and utopian world.⁴⁰

The disproportionate involvement of Jews in leftist and communist ideologies was expressed as a deep universalism and cosmopolitanism. It has been argued that radical Jews, who were not only isolated from their fellow Jews but at the same time constrained by an alien society, felt an overwhelming sense of dislocation which grew increasingly unbearable and resulted in a fierce contempt for racial loyalties. Born in an historical and political world that appeared corrupt and contained the seeds of its own destruction, these revolutionaries sought to smash and rebuild the established society, in the spirit of Abraham and the Jewish Prophets. Ferdinand Mount outlines how industrialization, with its imperatives of modernity, sought to maintain itself through the division of labour; the rational organisation of time; the separation of work and play; and the division between home and workplace.⁴¹ The subsequent cultural dislocation of these processes united revolutionary minds and instilled within them a utopian longing not for a new world but for one which was lost – a utopianism which is arguably the cosmopolitanism of Jewish messianic values and a longing for the world of Jewish culture and value.

The case of Karl Marx illustrates how the shock of the Emancipation, and the resulting reactions of Jewish intellectuals, are the continuation of an aspect of the Jewish tradition. The disdain for particularism and the cosmopolitanism of Jewish radicalism is best embodied in the figure of Rosa Luxemburg. Brought up in a family linked to the *maskilim* or Enlightenment movement, Luxemburg derided Yiddish, Zionism, and the

⁴⁰ For assimilating Jewry at the end of the nineteenth century, each day brought veiled transformations and problems of 'civility' in the world of strangers. As Jews moved 'beyond the pale' at the time of Emancipation, they were exposed to the individualistic and ceremonial modernity of the West, and found their *shtetl Yiddishkeit* philosophy to be lacking. This came to reconstitute the 'Jewish Emancipation problematic' in social modernity. The problems of assimilation into Western 'bourgeois' manners created the need for Jewish intellectuals to define a neutral social space in their ideologies, in which the common human experience would constitute equality between human beings. In the 'culture shock' resulting from Jewish emancipation: assimilation; and modernization, the Jewish intellectual became caught between 'his own' and the 'host culture'. The great discoveries of Jewish intellectuals, such as Freud, Marx and Levi-Strauss, is thus seen by Cuddihy and others as attempts to deal with this continuing and unsuccessful 'hidden transformation'.

⁴¹ F. Mount, (1977), 'Revolutionaries – Their Mind, Body and Soul' in *Encounter*, Vol. XLIX, December, pg. 69

Bund from a very early age.⁴² She scorned the values of the Jewish population of Eastern Europe, and it would seem that her criticism fell within the legacy of a very Jewish tradition.⁴³ In an often quoted letter to a Jewish social democrat that indicated her universalist outlook, Luxemburg wrote from prison ““Why do you come to me with your special Jewish sorrows? I feel just as sorry for the wretched Indian victims in Putamayo ... I have no special corner in my heart reserved for the ghetto. I feel at home in the entire world wherever there are clouds and birds and human tears””.⁴⁴ However, Luxemburg was not alone in universalizing Jewish values in the pursuit of justice.

Despite his ignorance of Judaism and loathing self-hatred, Paul Johnson states that there can be no doubt of Marx’s ‘Jewishness’.⁴⁵ Marx was not merely a Jewish thinker, but also deeply anti-Jewish - another hallmark of Jewish radicalism. Robert Wistrich sees this phenomenon as a reflection of the rage felt by a few highly intelligent members of an underprivileged minority who were denied access to positions and recognition in society that their talents rightly deserved.⁴⁶ Marx’s solution to this dilemma lay in the transformation of economic relations that would in turn alter human relationships and the interaction between the Jew and society.⁴⁷ For Marx in particular, the economic explanation of alienation is a veil for a deep-rooted social alienation. Marx, and therefore his ideology of socialism, can be seen as an example of Jewish radicalism which stems from the universalization of Jewish values in response to the modern world.

The history of the Jewish left raises one of the most basic questions of Jewish history, namely the question of the origins of Jewish radicalism.⁴⁸ This question debates whether the source of Jewish radicalism is uniquely Jewish or based on external influences. From one perspective, the Jews attraction to socialism derived from an authentic and deeply

⁴² J. Jacobs, (1992) *On Socialists and ‘The Jewish Question’ after Marx* (USA: New York University Press), drawing on pages 157 and 158

⁴³ J. Jacobs, (1992) *On Socialists and ‘The Jewish Question’ after Marx*, pg. 158

⁴⁴ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 600-601

⁴⁵ P. Johnson, (1987). *A History of the Jews*, pg. 347

⁴⁶ Ibid. pg. 349

⁴⁷ Ibid. pg. 352

⁴⁸ E. Mendelsohn, (1997). *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left* (New York: New York University Press), pg. 15

rooted Jewish tradition of social justice, as articulated by the Biblical prophets. The revolutionary Jewish thinkers of Marxism and Socialism are in this light the true heirs of the Prophets, in spite of their radical secularism and contempt for religion, including Judaism.⁴⁹ Mendelsohn questions whether the conspicuous presence of Jews in communist parties and regimes may be attributed to the traditional Jewish concern of social justice, or the erroneous belief by some Jews that communism could shield them from the antisemitism of 'nationalism'.⁵⁰

The 'Non-Jewish Jew'

Jewish radicals therefore appear to be the bearers of historical memory of the tradition of justice, humanism, cosmopolitanism and empathy with the oppressed within Judaism. These secular and modern Jews appear to be influenced by something Jewish, however tenuous. Here it seems that Deutscher's notion of the 'non-Jewish Jew' is most useful. For Isaac Deutscher, the Jewish heretic who moves beyond Jewry belongs to a Jewish tradition.⁵¹ Throughout history, many Jews have found Jewry too narrow and constraining, and have therefore searched for ideas beyond Judaism. These Jews possessed the key ingredients of Jewish experience and intellect, and emerged on the cusp of great epochs.⁵² Dwelling on the borders of great civilisations, they came to represent much of the greatness of "profound upheavals in modern thought" and were influenced by diverse cultures and ideologies.⁵³ "Each of them", wrote Deutscher "was in society and yet not in it, of it and yet not of it. It was this that enabled them to rise in thought above their societies, above their nations, above their times and generations, and to strike out mentally into wide new horizons and far into the future".⁵⁴ These are the 'non-Jewish Jews'. With the conditions within which they lived not allowing them to resolve themselves with nationally or religiously limited ideas, 'non-Jewish Jews' were thus stirred to work for the universal view of life; humanity; and the world.

⁴⁹ E. Mendelsohn. (1997). 'Introduction', pg. 15

⁵⁰ Ibid. pg. 15

⁵¹ I. Deutscher. (1968). *The Non-Jewish Jews and Other Essays* (London: Oxford University Press). pg. 26

⁵² I. Deutscher. (1968). *The Non-Jewish Jew*, pg. 26

⁵³ Ibid. pg. 26

⁵⁴ Ibid. pg. 27

Isaac Deutscher, himself a young Hasidic master in his youth who transformed into a renowned Marxist thinker, recalls his personal attraction to the secular elements of Yiddish culture, manifested in the literature and poetry of Jewish workers in Poland in the first decades of the twentieth century.⁵⁵ “We knew the Talmud, we had been steeped in Khassidism”, wrote Isaac Deutscher, “all its idealizations were for us nothing but dust thrown into our eyes. We had grown up with a Jewish past. We had the eleventh, and thirteenth and sixteenth centuries of Jewish history living next door to us and under our very roof; and we wanted to escape it and live in the twentieth century”.⁵⁶

Deutscher falls into the tradition of Luxemburg, Trotsky and Freud, each a ‘non-Jewish Jew’ who, Deutscher argues “was formed amid historic cross-currents”.⁵⁷ These revolutionaries studied societies from the sidelines and came to grasp the basic regularities of life whilst still conceiving the flux of reality. In this way, the common historical experience of Jewry of being the devalued ‘other’, as well as the fundamental essence of Jewish values with their emphasis on learning and justice, was embedded within the ‘non-Jewish Jew’. The common link between the ‘non-Jewish Jew’ and their inherent ‘Jewishness’ as they expanded from the particular to the universal, was the notion of justice – from the justice of the Jewish tradition to the justice of radical philosophies.

The Jews became a people in the events following their exodus from Egypt. Later, the Diaspora made the uniqueness of Judaism visible as the survival of the people was assured by membership in a community of faith. The Jewish revolutionary also belongs to a community of faith, extending beyond class and nation to reach across the boundaries that divide.

⁵⁵ I. Deutscher, (1968). *The Non-Jewish Jew*, pg. 44

⁵⁶ Ibid. pg. 49

⁵⁷ Ibid. pg. 30

At a deeper level the Jewish identity of radical Jews, rather than being negated by their mission, was in fact brought to a higher level of fulfilment.⁵⁸ Deutscher asks what makes a Jew. "Religion? I am an atheist. Jewish nationalism? I am an internationalist. In neither sense am I, therefore, a Jew. I am, however, a Jew by force of my unconditional solidarity with the persecuted and exterminated. I am a Jew because I feel the Jewish tragedy as my own tragedy; because I feel the pulse of Jewish history".⁵⁹ For Deutscher the role of the intellectual is to remain an eternal protestor - to maintain opposition towards the powers that be and to struggle for a society in which nationalism and racism lose their narrow hold on humankind's consciousness.⁶⁰ This is the framework within which Jewish radicals in have cast themselves. We will see many of these ideas played out in the lives of the South African Jewish radicals.

⁵⁸ 'The Passion of the Jews', (1975), in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4, Summer. Found at: www.jstor.org, pg. 166-167

⁵⁹ 'The Passion of the Jews', pg. 167

⁶⁰ I. Deutscher, (1968). *The Non-Jewish Jew*, pg. 58

Chapter Three

Marx asks the Jew to, “bear witness to the suffering of all, not just his own, to be the eyes of justice”.⁶¹

⁶¹ D. Goldberg and M. Krausz. (1993). ‘Introduction: The Culture of Identity’, pg. 11

Radicals of South Africa - Background

Context of radicalism

The secularization of Jewish values into universal ideologies in the modern world, as well as the failure of the promises of Emancipation, impacted greatly on the Jewish radicals in South Africa. Before moving into an analysis of the autobiographies and biographies of the immigrant generation, it is necessary to briefly explore the broader political context, and the history of Jewish socialist movements, which influenced and shaped the world of the immigrant 'non-Jewish Jew'.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed an explosion of radical protest movements. These movements were based on the essential principle that, "economic exploitation of one class by another is evil".⁶² Ezra Mendelsohn describes the way in which Jewish socialism was born in the Russian pale of settlement prior to the First World War.⁶³ It was here that the two main factors necessary for the emergence of Jewish socialism existed, "a large, mostly Yiddish-speaking Jewish working class, labouring under extremely oppressive economic conditions, and an acculturated but not necessarily assimilated Jewish intelligentsia influenced by both Russian socialist and Jewish nationalist doctrines".⁶⁴

In the 1870s and 1880s the first attempts at formulating Jewish socialist ideologies was made, and the earliest organisations were formed. In this period, the founders of Jewish radicalism were faced with the dilemma of reconciling broad socialist principles with a connection and sensitivity to the unique requirements of the Jewish community.⁶⁵ The defining aspect of Jewish socialism from its inception was its international character.⁶⁶

⁶² E. Mendelsohn, (1997). 'Introduction' in *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left* (USA: New York University Press), pg. 1

⁶³ E. Mendelsohn, (1997). 'Introduction', pg. 1

⁶⁴ Ibid, pg. 2

⁶⁵ Ibid, pg. 2

⁶⁶ Ibid, pg. 2

The first Jewish socialist party was the General Jewish Workers' Union in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia, popularly known as the Bund, was established in 1897 in the Jewish religious and cultural centre of Vilna.⁶⁷ Mendelsohn describes the Bund as “first and foremost a revolutionary organisation, Marxist in orientation and committed to the doctrine of class struggle. It saw itself as the ‘sole representative’ of the Russian-Jewish working class, whose historical task was to lead the revolutionary struggle within the Jewish community and, hand in hand with the working classes of other nations, topple tsarist despotism and replace it with a classless society”.⁶⁸ Internationalist in outlook, this organisation was also specifically ‘Jewish’ in orientation, and soon came to establish its own form of Jewish nationalism. With the principle of *doikeyt* at its core, a Yiddish word referring to Jews staying in their place of residence and fighting for their rights in eastern Europe, the Bund was fiercely anti-Zionist.⁶⁹

At the dawn of the twentieth century a variety of Jewish groups began to propose a synthesis of socialism and Zionism which would seek to build a national Jewish home in Palestine, and simultaneously establish in the new and old motherland a socialist society based on a Jewish agricultural working class.⁷⁰

The radical immigrant generation in South Africa however, was also moulded by processes and influences unique to their specific location and experiences, and these must be addressed for a greater insight into the autobiographical world. In the early decades of the twentieth century, most Jewish immigrants to South Africa were working class and many had previously been exposed to socialist ideas in their country of origin, often by the Bund.

Milton Shain and Richard Mendelsohn grapple with the importance of migration on the South African Jewish Experience. Shain and Mendelsohn state that, “As a community built essentially upon the great wave of Jewish migration from Lithuania in the four

⁶⁷ E. Mendelsohn. (1997). ‘Introduction’, drawing on pages 3 to 4

⁶⁸ Ibid. pg. 3

⁶⁹ Ibid. pg. 4

⁷⁰ Ibid. pg. 4

decades prior to the First World war, that experience, including the cultural baggage brought by the newcomers, cannot be ignored in the shaping of their new identity and their behaviour in the new country”.⁷¹ James Campbell introduces the role of “changing Jewish settlement patterns, class formation, experiences of work and leisure, and perhaps most importantly, about immigrant family life”.⁷² He underlines the impact of migration, its consequent disruption and alienation, by stating that “South Africa’s celebrated Jewish radicalism”, may be, “a function of historically specific processes of dislocation and conflict”.⁷³ Gideon Shimoni understands Jewish radical activism in the immigrant generation as primarily a sociological factor of, “marginality or outsider status in relation to established elites and interests of white South African society compounded by alienation from Jewish religion and the normative life of the Jewish community”.⁷⁴

Glenn Frankel, writes that the radical activists of South Africa were schooled in dialectical materialism and sought Marxist principles – classic ‘non-Jewish Jews’; they did not deny their ethnic origins but treated them as irrelevant in contrast to the principles of universalism and socialist utopia.⁷⁵ Far from examples of self-hatred, these activists were, according to Frankel, immersed in a tradition with a long Jewish history, in which the universal subsumed particularism, and religion was seen as an atavistic nationalism.⁷⁶

⁷¹ E. Mendelsohn, (1997). ‘Introduction’, pg. 8

⁷² J. Campbell, (2000). ‘Beyond the Pale’: Jewish Immigration and the South African Left’ in (eds) Shain, M. and Mendelsohn, R. (2000). *Memories, Realities and Dreams: Aspects of the South African Jewish Experience* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers), pg. 99

⁷³ M. Shain and R. Mendelsohn, (2000). ‘Introduction’ in (eds) Shain, M. and Mendelsohn, R. *Memories, Realities and Dreams: Aspects of the South African Jewish Experience* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers) , pg. 11

⁷⁴ G. Shimoni, (2000). ‘Accounting for Jewish radicals in Apartheid South Africa’: Jewish Immigration and the South African Left’ in (eds) Shain, M. and Mendelsohn, R. (2000) *Memories, Realities and Dreams: Aspects of the South African Jewish Experience* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers). pg. 185

⁷⁵ M. Shain and S. Frankental, (1993). ‘Accommodation, Apathy and Activism: Jewish Political behaviour in South Africa’ in *Jewish Quarterly*, Spring, pg. 7

⁷⁶ G. Frankel, (1999). *Rivonia’s Children* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers). drawing on concluding chapter

Radicals in South Africa

Sense of 'Jewishness'

The radical 'non-Jewish Jews' of South Africa had a sense of 'Jewishness' and a conception of justice that was deeply rooted in the Eastern European Jewish immigrant milieu. As Berger writes, this band of Jewish radicals, "tended to express their Jewish identity less in religious observance than through their secular commitment to 'repairing the world' through struggles for social justice".⁷⁷ Their 'Jewishness', in this light, is therefore connected to the extensive Jewish tradition of humanism, empathy for the oppressed and cosmopolitanism. These radicals secularised and universalised the Jewish values of social justice, *tikkun olam* and *tzedakah*, and brought them into modernity within the context of a racially divided and prejudiced South Africa.

The radicals explored in the pages that follow were chosen for their lasting influence on South African political history, their role in the anti-apartheid struggle and their international reputation as protectors of justice. Their lives have many discontinuities, but there are also fundamental continuities that link their identities and actions.

Ray Alexander's commitment to communism in South Africa, and her sense of 'Jewishness', was inextricably linked to her Eastern European Jewish inheritance. Alexander arrived in South Africa already a politically sophisticated underground member of the Latvian communist movement. She was immediately absorbed into a small community of Jewish activists who held a strong commitment towards the radical ideologies which had made the journey across from Europe with them.⁷⁸ Born in the Latvian town of Varklian, Alexander was immersed in a Jewish milieu from the start.⁷⁹ Her paternal grandfather was a rabbi steeped in the teachings of the Talmud and the Alexander home was used as a *cheyder* where Jewish boys would study religious texts

⁷⁷ I. Berger, (2004). 'Introduction' in Alexander, R. *All MyLife and All My Strength* (Johannesburg: STE Publishers), pg. 7

⁷⁸ I. Berger, (2004). 'Introduction', pg. 6

⁷⁹ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, drawing on page 24

and prepare for their bar mitzvahs. Alexander and a sister were also asked by their father to attend *cheyder* after school, thereby affording them a uniquely in-depth Jewish education for girls at that time.⁸⁰ A deep sense of 'Jewishness' was therefore born within Alexander, and she was imbued with the values of the Jewish tradition from an early age.

The literary culture in the Alexander home was not solely focused on religious texts but was also supplemented with great secular works of philosophy and the well-known Yiddish books of the day. "In our lounge there were two bookcases from the floor to the ceiling. One was for the Talmud and Hebrew and Yiddish books by writers such as Shalom Aleichem ... The other bookcase held translations of Heinrich Heine, the German poet, and Russian books by Tolstoy and others".⁸¹ The dual bookcases point to this radical's exposure at a young age to diverse cultural opinions. Studying a variety of languages and immersed in Jewish history, she was instilled with the historical memory of the Spanish Inquisition, antisemitism in Latvia and the Russian pogroms, Alexander was a 'non-Jewish Jew' that was 'of Jewry but not of it'. Transcending boundaries and societal norms to create a new status quo, Alexander would be the embodiment of the Jewish rebel in modern times in South Africa.⁸²

Alexander's sense of 'Jewishness' was personified in her early identification with Jewish radical thought. As a child, her father passed on to her, "booklets on health, on leaders of the Bund, on socialist and communist leaders ... this is the way I got the story of Vera Figner and Rosa Luxemburg. In this way father introduced me to the Jewish [socialist]

⁸⁰ Occasionally revealing itself through the stories of the immigrant generation was the issue of gender relations in the world of radical immigrant Jewry. Alexander recalls one of her first memories of her grandfather, "At the evening meal, he prayed, 'Thank you, G-d, for making me a man and not a woman', and then asked us all to repeat it. Although I was only four years old, I apparently refused. I told him, 'I am as good as a man'". Alexander balked at the inequality of certain Jewish customs, and sought to transcend these barriers and prejudices in her work as a Communist. Slovo, speaking of his sister, writes "Sonia resented the fact that I was the only one to say *kaddish* [prayer for the dead] and, in the privacy of our shared bedroom, she defiantly chanted the prayer before going to sleep. I feared that terrible things would be visited upon her for this blasphemy". These actions were met with disapproval by his father and sister. Women in Hirson's family found their livelihoods through marriage which was seen as an act to further one's social status for women, who were discouraged from pursuing professional work.

⁸¹ R. Alexander, (2004). *All My Life and All My Strength* (Johannesburg: STE Publishers), pg. 35

⁸² R. Alexander, (2004). *All My Life and All My Strength*, pg. 34

thinkers ... I was a Zionist when father died, but already I was moving away”.⁸³

Alexander’s father was a progressively religious man, attending synagogue not only every Friday and Saturday but also for Jewish holy days, and yet he, “could read German and Russian, which was quite exceptional in those days”.⁸⁴ International political events of the day were often discussed in the home and the local Jewish communist mayor was a great influence on Alexander’s early political development. “My father was a close friend to Leibe Yoffe, leading communist and founder of the Jewish Defence League”.⁸⁵ Surrounded by such a plethora of thought, and brought up with secularised Yiddish culture, Alexander had an identity that was formed by the meeting of various cultures and ideas.

Alexander had a strong sense of Jewish identity as a child, refusing to bow to a priest who taught her Latin if he insisted on wearing his cross.⁸⁶ She also experienced antisemitism at a young age and these memories stayed with her.⁸⁷ Despite seeing herself as a Zionist and undertaking office work in the Zionist organisation whilst at school, her early exposure to Communist figures and ideas meant that Alexander soon saw socialism as the correct response to antisemitism.⁸⁸ Growing up in a Jewish home that was also open to the ideas of the Enlightenment, the humanist traditions of Judaism bled into radical, modern ideologies. “My home, the house in which I was born and learnt my human values, included my father’s and mother’s bedroom – a big room with tapestries made by my father’s aunts hanging above the bed. The tapestries pictured Ruth, Esther and Rachel, and my father told us they were Jewish heroines”.⁸⁹ Later in South Africa, Alexander did not initially mix with other Jewish immigrants in South Africa because she said, “I didn’t see myself as Jewish”.⁹⁰ Alexander’s had shed the outward symbols of ‘Jewishness’ to take up the identity of a radical, itself a great tradition with innately Jewish roots in the writing of Abraham and the Prophets of the Hebrew Bible.

⁸³ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 25

⁸⁴ Ibid, pg. 25

⁸⁵ Ibid, pg. 25

⁸⁶ R. Alexander. (2004). *All My Life and All My Strength*, pg. 39

⁸⁷ Ibid, pg. 39

⁸⁸ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, drawing on page 27

⁸⁹ R. Alexander. (2004). *All My Life and All My Strength*, pg. 31

⁹⁰ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 32

Alexander joined the Communist Party in South Africa on 11 November 1929, shortly after her arrival in the country.⁹¹ When fired from her job for attending one of her first demonstrations in South Africa, under the charge of ‘walking with *shvartzers*’, she writes, “I was shocked that Jews could be racist, and could not understand that race discrimination here was like anti-Semitism in Europe”.⁹² Despite her statements that she did not see herself as Jewish nor view Jews as a separate nation, Alexander admonished her employers and obviously saw the behaviour of Jews as held to a higher standard. Despite her remarks about lacking a strong Jewish identity, Alexander and her husband identified with the Rosenbergs, Jewish Communists who were executed in the United States on charges of sending classified secrets to the Soviet Union, and even began the process of applying to adopt their orphaned children.⁹³ Alexander imparted knowledge of the Jewish experience onto her children when they were old enough to read, showing them the struggles of Jews in Poland and the history of the Holocaust, leaving any religious influence on them to her mother who would take them to synagogue on festivals. Clearly, the notion of ‘Jewishness’ played throughout various aspects of Alexander’s life. In many respects, Alexander’s example may be seen as an extension and secularization of the legacy of the Jewish matriarchs in fighting for the oppressed. In her life, the Jewish values of *tzedakah* and *tikkun olam*, as well as the historical memory of oppression, cultivated her Marxist and radical sympathies.

Like Ray Alexander, Pauline Podbrey grew up in the Jewish milieu of *shtetl* life, and was greatly influenced by the Jewish humanist and cosmopolitan views of her Bundist father. Raised in Lithuania, Podbrey attended a Yiddish speaking primary school at his insistence but later attended a Hebrew-speaking school and then a Lithuanian school, thus broadening her linguistic horizons.⁹⁴ Podbrey was very religious in her childhood, under the influence of her observant grandmother. Recalling the experience of observing the Jewish festival of Passover, Podbrey writes, “How intoxicating the evening proved to be!

⁹¹ R. Alexander, (2004). *All My Life and All My Strength*, pg. 52

⁹² Ibid, pg. 54

⁹³ Ibid, pg. 240

⁹⁴ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 50

How enchanting the memory of warm, enveloping family, of thrilling liturgy and the exciting sense of occasion, of participation, of belonging”.⁹⁵ Podbrey was drawn into the religious family of Judaism, but as she grew older found this world to be narrow and constricting and sought to transcend beyond. Although she shed the rituals and garb of Judaism, Podbrey retained the values of justice in Judaism in her worldview.

Podbrey’s belief in God was greatly challenged by her Father’s doubts, “‘I don’t believe that given the choice, most people wouldn’t behave decently’”.⁹⁶ This critique of a dishonest society relates to the ideology of radical Jewry. Podbrey recalls her Father urging that, “‘We need a decent, human, socialist society. Change society and you’ll change human nature, including the nature of the capitalists themselves’”.⁹⁷ With this socialist worldview adopted, Podbrey soon turned away from religion and became a confirmed communist.⁹⁸ Despite leaving the religious trappings of Judaism, Podbrey had bought into a very Jewish and simultaneously socialist humanist tradition which traces its roots back to the days of the Torah.

Unlike Alexander however, Podbrey was not exposed to scripture classes at school for they were deemed by her father to be ‘nonsense’. However a Jewish identity was still borne in her through her father, who answered the following question in this way, “‘So what do you call yourself?’ ‘I’m a Jew’, father replied ... this incident delighted and impressed me ... he proved that it was possible to be a proper Jew without religion”.⁹⁹ Podbrey states that as a Bundist, her father was “‘a member of the left-wing Jewish movement which maintained that Jews had a right to live where they were born and it was their duty to make their homelands safe, secure and dignified for all their inhabitants, not only for Jews’”.¹⁰⁰ Here, Podbrey describes her father as having certain qualities of the ‘non-Jewish Jew’, moving beyond the narrowness of the Jewish religion whilst still holding onto the humanist tradition within that culture.

⁹⁵ P. Podbrey, (1993). *White Girl in Search of the Party* (Pietermaritzburg: Haded Books), pg. 7

⁹⁶ P. Podbrey, (1993). *White Girl in Search of the Party*, pg. 9

⁹⁷ Ibid, pg. 9

⁹⁸ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 50

⁹⁹ P. Podbrey, (1993). *White Girl in Search of the Party*, pg. 19

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, pg. 2

Podbrey was also greatly influenced by her Jewish heritage. “My preoccupations with the timeless issues of morality, the meaning and purpose of life, were strongly reinforced by the discussions that took place in our living room”.¹⁰¹ As a child listening in on the late night left-wing Jewish meetings in her parent’s home, Podbrey recalled that, “They were passionate, earnest and dedicated to their cause which I soon discovered was Communism. Here, I realised, were men who cared about the world and who wanted to change it. I too would be a Communist when I grew up”.¹⁰² In the first months in South Africa, Podbrey recalls singing Yiddish songs for the fellow *landsleitman* or countrymen who would visit her family in the evenings to hear news from home, therefore she grew up in an Eastern European immigrant culture with a keen awareness of her ‘Jewishness’.

Podbrey has a sense of ‘Jewishness’ firmly rooted in the cosmopolitan tradition of Judaism. “I always regarded myself as Jewish. I read all the Jewish authors and classics, like Shalom Asch and Shalom Aleichem. I was interested in Jewish culture, although not in the religious part”.¹⁰³ When asked about the prejudice members of the Jewish community showed her children, especially by one Rabbi in particular, she states that it didn’t affect her pride in Judaism because “I felt he was betraying Judaism. I felt that he was a time-server who was not acting according to the true traditions of Jewish struggles for justice [and] that he was betraying me”.¹⁰⁴ This harks back to the old question of who is a Jew, “Some people say what makes the Jews are the ceremonies and observances, keeping the Sabbath etc. I myself am still searching for the answer. But the consciousness of being a Jew is certainly there, both among my children and myself”.¹⁰⁵

Joe Slovo had a similar consciousness of being Jewish from an early age, and also grew up in the Yiddish ghetto community of Obel, Lithuania. Jewish children at that time were kept from locals schools and taught at the synagogue by a Rabbi who crammed their

¹⁰¹ P. Podbrey, (1993). *White Girl in Search of the Party*, pg. 10

¹⁰² Ibid, pg. 10

¹⁰³ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 54

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, pg. 66

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, pg. 66

heads with knowledge solely from the 'Old Testament' or Hebrew Bible.¹⁰⁶ Slovo describes his childhood in the harsh environment of rural Lithuania as scattered with Jewish motifs, such as memories of the *mikvah* or ritual bath everyone would frequent on Fridays before Shabbat. Yiddish secular culture, such as songs of celebration and festive occasions, features prominently in his recollections.¹⁰⁷ Joe's father Wulfus Slovo left Lithuania when the young Slovo was two years old and once his father had saved enough money, he sent for the family which soon settled in Doornfontein, South Africa - the lowest 'rung of the Jewish residential ladder'.¹⁰⁸ Slovo attended the local Jewish school, whose pupils generally came from Eastern European immigrant families and, with a bald head from the delousing process and being a recent arrival, Slovo was teased as the 'Bald Bolshie'.¹⁰⁹ Again one sees in Slovo an immigrant 'Jewishness', where even his first love was a young Jewish girl.¹¹⁰

Slovo describes his sense of 'Jewishness' as derived from the humanist notions of Judaism, once stating that his, "pedigree is not unconnected with Jewishness and even Zionism".¹¹¹ Slovo believed his strong moral code originated from his religious childhood and, although he had already rejected religion by the time he stood in the synagogue to recite his bar mitzvah portion, this Jewish moral code provided a strong ethical base even if the ritual aspects were later rejected.¹¹² Experiences in the village ghetto; the Jewish Workers Club in Doornfontein; and even membership of the Zionist-Marxist Jewish youth movement *Hashomeyr Hatzair*, were all highlighted as formative moments in Slovo's life.¹¹³ Indeed, he believed that it was only as a result of emerging from a ghetto-community steeped in 'chauvinism' that Slovo truly came to understand and ultimately discard religious bigotry.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁶ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 224

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. pg. 225

¹⁰⁸ J. Slovo. (1995). *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography* (South Africa: Ravan Press). pg. 14

¹⁰⁹ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 227

¹¹⁰ J. Slovo. (1995). *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography*, pg. 15

¹¹¹ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 223

¹¹² Ibid. pg. 223

¹¹³ Ibid. pg. 223

¹¹⁴ Ibid. pg. 224

Slovo is a perfect example of the 'non-Jewish Jew', who continued the traditions of Judaism and the Prophets in a secular, universalist tone in the world of apartheid South Africa. He lived and worked in very Jewish surroundings throughout his life, especially during his early years. Like many 'non-Jewish Jews' throughout history, Slovo often had his 'Jewishness' thrust upon him by others. During a legal strike in 1942, Slovo was targeted by his boss for being the chief shop steward. "He was truly sad that 'a nice Jewish boy' like me, who was given the privilege of working for 'such a nice Jewish firm' should behave in such an ungrateful fashion".¹¹⁵ It is interesting to note however that even in exile Slovo spent time with a group of comrades who all happened to be of Jewish origin. Dolny writes that they never experienced "any Friday night get-togethers, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur pass us by without much notice and yet there is a tangible comfortableness that is rooted in a shared cultural manifest in our pleasure in eating Sue's superb chopped liver".¹¹⁶ A definite 'Jewishness' existed within this outwardly 'non-Jewish Jew'.

The fragments of historical memory which lived on in Slovo formed a distinctive identity that resonated with secular Yiddish culture. Jeremy Cronin commented on Slovo's 'Jewishness', stating that his "personality was deeply influenced by his secular Jewish roots, and the left East European émigré circles that were so important to the early Communist Party of South Africa. There was definitely something Jewish about Slovo's joke telling, for instance. It embodied a secular wisdom that came from the *shtetl*, a humanism born of a lineage of suffering survived, not just heroically, but wryly, jokes that are told against oneself".¹¹⁷ An instance of the Yiddish cultural tendency to use humour to overcome a life of prejudice is evinced in Slovo's words, "My selective memories have a predilection for the ludicrous and the comic which lightens and makes it possible to bear more easily the heaviness and often tragedies of struggle".¹¹⁸ Slovo's

¹¹⁵ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 230

¹¹⁶ Ibid, pg. 236

¹¹⁷ Ibid, pg. 244

¹¹⁸ H. Dolny, (1995). 'Introduction' in Slovo, J. (1995). *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography* (South Africa: Ravan Press), pg. xii

nostalgia for Yiddish music was embodied in the pleasure he took in listening to tapes of Doris Feidman with his dinner guests, who often seemed to be almost all Jewish.¹¹⁹

Ultimately, what Slovo gained from his Jewish immigrant childhood was a, “solid sense of belonging to a community; rich oral culture; and knowledge of what it is to be poor, to be discriminated against”.¹²⁰ Clearly Slovo gained progressive insights in reaction to religious practice, and was furthermore influenced by his sister’s early rebellion against gender discrimination in the synagogue when she took it upon herself to recite the prayer for the departed for their deceased mother. However he also, “rejected Jewish political activism which was in and of itself Jewish ... He was first and foremost a South African, a communist activist who, by the by, happened to be Jewish in origin”.¹²¹ Jewish humanism therefore clearly lay at the feet of Jewish morality, and although the practices of the Jewish religion were discarded, Slovo and others continued to operate their life’s work within the framework of secularized Jewish values.

Rowley Arenstein’s father was also from Lithuania whilst his mother came from a Menshevik family that were active in the Menshevik party in the Ukraine.¹²² For Rowley Arenstein, ‘Jewishness’ was part and parcel of his life. Growing up in a Jewish environment as a good bar mitzvah *bocher*, Arenstein’s daily life was filled with the wisdom of Solomon and the Bible.¹²³ Arenstein remembers that the response of some in the Jewish community upon hearing of his activities with the Communist Party was, ‘With a mother like that what would you expect?’¹²⁴ Arenstein’s maternal grandfather was a rabbi not interested in politics, but his daughters were Mensheviks and treated him with the utmost respect. Arenstein says, “My mother taught me social consciousness. I’ll never forget the influence she had on my life. My father taught me, you look after your family”.¹²⁵ Arenstein’s father attended *shul* regularly on Friday nights and the family kept the high holidays traditionally, and whilst the parents spoke Yiddish in the home they

¹¹⁹ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 237

¹²⁰ Ibid, pg. 243

¹²¹ Ibid, pg. 243

¹²² Ibid, pg. 372

¹²³ Ibid, pg. 374

¹²⁴ Ibid, pg. 375

¹²⁵ Ibid, pg. 374

encouraged the children to read English translations of great Yiddish works.¹²⁶ Zionism was a cause the family contributed to as, ‘You never know what can happen in South Africa, one day you might have to go to Israel’.¹²⁷ A strong Jewish identity was therefore inculcated within Arenstein from his birth.

Arenstein attended *cheyder* where he learnt Hebrew in preparation for his bar mitzvah. He recalls being taught the history of the Jews by a rabbi, and he was shocked at the events that had taken place in Catholic Europe during the Inquisition. Writing of torture being used to enforce Jewish assimilation, Arenstein explained that “Many of them succumbed, but some became secret Jews, Marranos. They were resisting. And right from the beginning I learned that one must resist what is wrong. One can’t just sit back ...”¹²⁸ A great tradition of resistance from the time of the Prophets, standing up against tyranny has been a hallmark of Jewish history through the ages. When the young Arenstein confronted his mother over the fact that the family broke certain observances she replied, “One day, two thousand years ago, a Roman soldier went to a rabbi in Palestine and said, ‘If I stand on one foot can you tell me the whole of the Jewish religion?’ ... and Hillel said, ‘Do unto others as you expect them to do unto you. That is the essence of the Jewish religion. The rest is commentary’”.¹²⁹ This was an important lesson from the Jewish humanist tradition, and can be seen to have struck a chord in Arenstein’s identity and how he related to his ‘Jewishness’. Reflecting on his own children’s ‘Jewishness’, Arenstein writes that he “always believed that you must acknowledge your Jewishness,

¹²⁶ Another issue influencing the identity of this generation was the language barrier between children and parents. This fuelled the development of these radical Jews’ status as ‘outsiders’, thereby increasing their propensity for radicalism. Slovo’s relationship with his parents was one that represents the wider family relations of the immigrant generation – a gulf of language, worldview and social milieu between the parents and the children. Referring to his father, Slovo writes: “Between him and me there was hardly ever a father-son relationship ... He could never express himself in English, and since I quickly lost my capacity to use Yiddish, the communication between us became more and more restricted”. Hirson lived with his maternal grandparents until he was four years old. Hirson recalls the fact that both grandparents spoke Yiddish and that this created a barrier that distorted any emotional closeness. However, a Jewish social structure was strong in Hirson’s home, with his family all marrying into the faith. Emerging from the immigrant milieu, these Jewish radicals retained a ‘Jewishness’ in their lives, albeit through with disparate definitions of what it means to be a Jew and through a variety of means.

¹²⁷ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 375

¹²⁸ Ibid, pg. 373

¹²⁹ Ibid, pg. 373

so that people know you are a Jew. And you must be able to face the world as a Jew. You are a Jew, you're born a Jew".¹³⁰

For Arenstein, a Jewish identity also meant a life of struggling against prejudice. "In *cheyder* our rabbi used to take the Bible and read the comments of people like Rambam (Maimonides) and others", Arenstein continues, "We were taught, you can't say man is just man. From an early date I learned that man was not just an individual, but a social man. Without society he was nothing. So, that taught me that one must fight for the rights of people".¹³¹ Arenstein believes we "must all learn to work together. All people should get together, you see".¹³² Arenstein clearly took Judaism's universalised humanist perspective to heart, and evoked this notion in his radical activism.

Arenstein enjoyed Jewish writers, and studied the writings of Jewish leaders who led the struggle against the Greeks and Romans, going back to the time they were expelled from Palestine and fought back.¹³³ From this revolutionary tradition of challenging the status quo, Arenstein drew much inspiration. Suttner comments on the way in which Arenstein constructs his view of activism, "You know, the way you refer to things Lenin said ... it's almost like you're citing some revered rabbi. It's supposedly a very Jewish thing, to have great respect for words. G-d created the world with words, words become almost more important, in some ways, than actions. Or rather, words become actions".¹³⁴

The Jewish tradition here obviously influenced Arenstein's worldview and motivated his radical action. Arenstein argues that *Pesach* and the cultural markings of Ashkenazi Jews are real and influence Jewry – extending to social and political activism in many ways. "I didn't want to go around flaunting that I was a Jew, because in actual fact I'm an atheist. I've never hesitated to say I'm Jewish, but I don't agree with the Bible".¹³⁵ Arenstein continues, "I've always said, 'I'm a Jew'. You can't help it, because I learned at an early

¹³⁰ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 394

¹³¹ Ibid. pg. 374

¹³² Ibid. pg. 394

¹³³ Ibid. pg. 395

¹³⁴ Ibid. pg. 395

¹³⁵ Ibid. pg. 393

stage that you've got to fight like a Jew. I was astounded by the rise of Hitler, and I studied that inside out, what Hitler was up to, and what happened to the Jews".¹³⁶ From this knowledge, Arenstein resolved to never disown his 'Jewishness' and to rather bring it into a greater fulfilment by working for social justice.

Albie Sachs also recalls a very Jewish environment from his school days at *cheyder* and growing up in the shadow of the Gardens Synagogue.¹³⁷ "My mother was a Jew, Rachel Ginsberg. My father was a Jew, Solly Sachs. They'd both come from Eastern Europe".¹³⁸ Sachs was exposed as much to the secular Yiddish immigrant culture as he was to the world of radical politics of the time.¹³⁹ Sachs' mother was a member of the Communist Party and his parents' friends were all leading radicals. Sachs was therefore immersed in the radical world where a natural non-racial environment existed. "Of course that was the most wonderful thing for a young white growing up: to see, not the non-racism per se, but the general respect and the affection and the way people related. There was real equality there".¹⁴⁰ From his first memories, Sachs was exposed to the very Jewish Eastern European immigrant world and a multiracialism which signified the continuation of the Jewish notion of universalism and a brotherhood of man.

As a young person he had no concept of the meaning of being Jewish.¹⁴¹ "Our Jewishness, to the extent that it existed, had much more to do with temperament, broad values, enjoying a good argument, humour, a certain kind of vitality, having expectations of life".¹⁴² The difficulty for Sachs was the notion of religious identification, "My parents had fought their parents in relation to religion, and it had been violent ... In terms of who they were, what they stood for, their internationalism as they saw it".¹⁴³ Sachs therefore grew up in a home where, "it was for each to do what they believed in".¹⁴⁴ Sachs was

¹³⁶ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 393

¹³⁷ Ibid. pg. 346

¹³⁸ Ibid. pg. 346

¹³⁹ Suttner explains that Sachs' father had been the renowned trade unionist Solly Sachs, who belonged to the Labour Party after being expelled from the Communist Party in the 1930s.

¹⁴⁰ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 343

¹⁴¹ Ibid. pg. 347

¹⁴² Ibid. pg. 351

¹⁴³ Ibid. pg. 347

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. pg. 347

touched by the stories of King Solomon and the multicultural nation he ruled. “One can see in the whole history of the Jews this double stream all the time. Instead of seeing the association with other cultures and peoples as assimilation and repudiation, one can see it as a broadening-out of the interchange, and an enrichment of world culture and Jewish culture”.¹⁴⁵ In light of this, one can see that Sachs was the offspring of Jews who eschewed the traditional religious aspects of Jewish identity and sought to adapt its values into the modern world in a more universal and secular frame.

Each of the radicals discussed thus far therefore had a strong sense of ‘Jewishness’ from a young age – through the values of Judaism that were part and parcel of their childhood and as a result of the impression of the ‘outsider’ social position of Jews in Eastern European and South African society. Baruch Hirson was also greatly influenced by an urbane middle class culture of the Eastern European Jewish immigrant world, which depended on ‘popular intellectual curiosity’ and a craving for knowledge whilst reflecting a social environment in which people grew up economically unstable socially marginalized.¹⁴⁶ This atmosphere produced a vigorous political and intellectual life, in which the young Hirson saw his concerns of identity and justice bleeding into each other.¹⁴⁷ The son of Latvian immigrants to South Africa, Hirson writes that even his generation “heard of a pernicious anti-Semitism that permeated the land of the Tsars, of ghettos, college quotas and accusations of ritual killings. Above all else were the dreaded pogroms”.¹⁴⁸ ‘Jewishness’ for Hirson was thereby linked to the struggles of the past, and the triumph of surviving the perils of prejudice, even for those Jews who did not see themselves as Jewish in any religious sense. Hirson reflects on the influence of the historical memory of persecution on forming a Jewish identity.

Hirson did have a religious education however; he attended the *Talmud Torah* or Hebrew school from age four for a brief period.¹⁴⁹ Many of the rituals of Judaism became part of his life growing up. “The Mendelsohns were not over-devout, but every year, in a

¹⁴⁵ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 359

¹⁴⁶ T. Lodge, (1995). ‘Foreword’, pg. xii

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, pg. xiii

¹⁴⁸ B. Hirson, (1995). *Revolutions in My Life* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press), pg. 13

¹⁴⁹ B. Hirson, (1995). *Revolutions in My Life*, pg. 23

tradition they must have brought with them from Latvia, baskets of red grapes were bought and crushed for the Passover wine".¹⁵⁰ Hirson's family did not attend synagogue, except for the Jewish holy days.¹⁵¹ However, the legacy of the social position of Jews throughout the ages was imprinted onto Hirson's memory, even though he attested to its relative insignificance in his life. "Though I had not experienced any anti-Jewishness, I was made aware of its presence by the Bible stories, reinforced through visits to the synagogue and the appearance of those special cakes. But these were tiny interludes that barely intruded on the ordinariness of everyday life".¹⁵² Hirson's father was highly critical of Judaism, adding to Hirson's own scepticism, "The literal truth was questioned, and from that came a questioning of the entire Bible. The criticism was not answered".¹⁵³ The paradox of Bible stories which Hirson perceived as placing the Jews at the centre of the universe as G-d's chosen people, stirred within him a discontent and a desire to eschew notions of 'chosenness' were addressed in his young adult years as he came to symbolise the 'non-Jewish Jew'.¹⁵⁴

Hirson was a perfect example of a non-Jewish Jew, seeing no affinity with the Jewish religion. Having had a Bar Mitzvah which he learnt for by rote without understanding the meaning or gleaned any inspiration, Hirson felt alienated from religion and describes how his "early distance grew into an atheism in which there was no possible place for these devotees of God. From amongst this body of clerics those from whom I felt most alienated, and whom I came to detest the most, were the rabbis. I had more encounters with these men, saw them at closer range and was particularly incensed by their narrowness and their refusal to recognise their distance from contemporary norms".¹⁵⁵ It was therefore the confines of thinking that characterised certain elements in the Jewish community which propelled Hirson into a cosmopolitan life that surpassed particularistic boundaries.

¹⁵⁰ B. Hirson, (1995). *Revolutions in My Life*, pg. 25

¹⁵¹ Ibid. pg. 26-27

¹⁵² Ibid. pg. 27

¹⁵³ Ibid. pg. 29

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. pg. 39

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. pg. 55

In an important episode in the young Hirson's life, he was sent for the school holidays to visit his staunchly religious aunt and uncle, and whilst there was expected to join his cousin in Hebrew classes each day. "One holiday I decided that enough was enough and tried to convince Julius and his friends that we could safely cut the next day's class. It did not work ... a phone call communicated the act of rebellion to my parents. But when I got home I was the toast of the dinner table and my escapade was blown up into an attempted strike. This was my first venture into 'class struggle'".¹⁵⁶ Hirson's rebelliousness against tradition and authority was encouraged by his more secular-leaning parents and this was something that would stay with him. However, even later in life Hirson frequented Jewish circles, and later fell in love with a Jewish girl he had met through the Zionist organisation *Hashomeyr Hatzair*. An inherent consciousness of 'Jewishness' continued to exist within the atheism of this 'non-Jewish Jew'.¹⁵⁷

Much like the radicals examined previously, Ben Turok grew up within a "ghetto of white immigrants from Eastern Europe", where he attended a school that comprised quite a few Jewish immigrants.¹⁵⁸ Turok's parents were poor Jews born in Byelorussia, and having grown up as Jews in the "highly charged political climate of Tsarist Russia, they were influenced by radical Bundist politics and my father became associated with the Jewish Labour Movement ... They both witnessed the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution ... Indeed, they were subjected to the White Terror of the anti-Semitic Cossacks and witnessed Jews being strung up from lampposts".¹⁵⁹ As the situation worsened Turok's parents sold their possessions and fled to neighbouring Latvia where the country soon became gripped by the Depression and fascism.¹⁶⁰ In the midst of this antisemitism and economic failure Turok's father immigrated to South Africa.¹⁶¹ The historical memory of these experiences was transported with them and was arguably manifested in the children's political awareness.

¹⁵⁶ B. Hirson, (1995). *Revolutions in My Life*, pg. 48

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. pg. 338

¹⁵⁸ B. Turok, (2003). *Nothing But the Truth: Behind the ANC's Struggle Politics* (South Africa: Jonathan Ball Publishers), pg. 12

¹⁵⁹ B. Turok, (2003). *Nothing But the Truth*, pg. 13

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. pg. 13

¹⁶¹ Ibid. pg. 14

Turok's father was active within the Jewish Workers' Movement in Cape Town.¹⁶² Turok's parents entertained at their home constantly, and he grew up surrounded by the debates and discussions of antiracism and contemporary events.¹⁶³ Turok therefore emerged from an immigrant milieu steeped in the heroic ideological struggles of Jewish workers, and this moulded his own political understanding of South Africa. In terms of Jewish identification, the activities in the Turok home were largely cultural and both parents were involved in various capacities in Yiddish theatre. "There were play readings, poetry evenings, political debates and a host of similar events all focusing on the Jewish way of life".¹⁶⁴ However, Turok was in this world but not of it, stating that he "began resenting all these old fogies who persistently intruded into our home, squabbling at the tops of their voices about some Jewish issue or other, and which increasingly seemed irrelevant to the world I encountered outside the walls of our home".¹⁶⁵ Turok began to shed his exclusive identification with a Jewish environment, "As I grew older, I thought the cult of 'Jewishness' futile, representing a fading past, beyond recapture – a lost cause drowning in extravagant sentiment".¹⁶⁶ Therefore Turok, in the great tradition of the 'non-Jewish Jew' that came before him, sought to transcend the limitations of Jewish identification and concern.

Turok describes his rebellion from 'Jewishness' and religious identity as a "watershed" which "freed me from the confines imposed by a narrow community, from the straitjacket of tradition, and from the horizons of an inherited world-view".¹⁶⁷ For Turok religion was not a fundamental part of his identity. "My parents were also not religious, although I was obliged to attend Hebrew school after regular school hours. But I had no taste for it and, since I had already been persuaded by my father not to have a Bar Mitzvah, I soon gave it up".¹⁶⁸ Despite this comment Turok became a choirboy in the synagogue choir, albeit for monetary reasons.¹⁶⁹ At the same time, through his parents' efforts in the arts

¹⁶² B. Turok, (2003). *Nothing But the Truth*, pg. 17

¹⁶³ Ibid. pg. 18

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. pg. 18

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. pg. 19

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. pg. 19

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. pg. 19

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. pg. 19

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. pg. 19

and public events, “it came to be understood in the family that a commitment to society was a necessary part of our existence. All that remained for me, as I grew up, was to identity my own particular cause”.¹⁷⁰ Free from these constraints and raised with a commitment to the wider social order, Turok became a radical in the vein of the ‘non-Jewish Jew’. Turok continues to say that within him there was “a certain independence of spirit, even a cheekiness, often verging on thumbing one’s nose at authority, which sometimes led me into trouble”.¹⁷¹ Clearly for Turok, acceptance into the familial tradition or Jewish circles was replaced by a belonging to a ‘Communist’ or revolutionary community.

All the radicals discussed thus far have shown themselves to have baulked against the yoke of the traditionally religious aspects of Judaism, against the social confines of South Africa during that time and against their assigned class and gender roles. These Jews did however, tap into the legacy of revolution which fills the annals of Jewish history – in this way, stepping beyond Judaism and yet carrying within them something eternally ‘Jewish’.

Such a radical, Taffy Adler, grew up in a very political working class family who lived in the poorer parts of Johannesburg. His father immigrated to South Africa from a town near Vilna in 1926, thereby narrowly escaping the devastation of the Holocaust which claimed the lives of six family members.¹⁷² Adler states that there was a, “whole range of families that my parents were friendly with who were part of a Jewish milieu. My father strayed from that milieu because of his intense political awareness”.¹⁷³ Adler’s family history in radical politics extended back to the times of Tsarist Russia, where his uncle and namesake, Tevya, was imprisoned for underground political activity as a member of the illegal Communist Party and an infiltrator into the army.¹⁷⁴ Adler’s family did not follow the Bundist tradition but rather emerged from the communist family which, despite their

¹⁷⁰ B. Turok, (2003). *Nothing But the Truth*, pg. 19

¹⁷¹ Ibid, pg. 20

¹⁷² I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 7

¹⁷³ Ibid, pg. 7

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, pg. 7

denial of this, were resolutely Jewish.¹⁷⁵ Adler writes that his father's Jewish roots were, "really in an intellectual understanding of Marxism and ideology, and he became one of these guys who slips between working-class activity like painting houses, and petty bourgeoisie activity as he tries to escape it".¹⁷⁶ This pedigree of the 'Jewish immigrant' brand of revolutionary activity ensured that Adler was also inducted into the Communist family, and that the spirit of his generation was immersed in the vestiges of the 'Old World'. This Jewish radicalism was a theme that Adler identifies as evident throughout the generations and "even into South Africa".¹⁷⁷

Many of the essential vestiges of Eastern European *shtetl* culture were disseminated into Adler's generation for despite the grim poverty and small-mindedness of *shtetl* life, it was the positive characteristics of interdependence and inclusive interactions between family and friends that were reproduced in the South African framework.¹⁷⁸ Adler's childhood home was always brimming with activity, where at big family lunches everyone, "would argue and debate the merits of socialism and other things in a highly argumentative way".¹⁷⁹ Adler clearly, "imbibed a strong sense of cultural Jewishness in the Eastern European tradition".¹⁸⁰

The values that follow from the *shtetl* locale and were passed on to Adler, "relate to a premium on human life ... I see myself as a humanist, as someone who values community, family ... One of the things that comes through is that I have always been committed in my work to organisation and team-building".¹⁸¹ Adler therefore brought the Jewish traditions of social justice and empathy with the underdog into a secular and more universal framework. "I cannot remember ever feeling consciously that I had to downplay my Jewishness. However, what is true is that many left-wing Jewish parents, in the fifties and later, were not open about their leftist activities in front of their children,

¹⁷⁵ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 9

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, pg. 9

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, pg. 9

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, pg. 12

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, pg. 12

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, pg. 7

¹⁸¹ Ibid, pg. 13

because they didn't want to upset the apple-cart".¹⁸² Although he shed any outward Jewish identification, Adler retained a certain Jewish quality in his humanism and continued in the radical tradition.

This humanism was also manifested in the life of Raymond Suttner, who was born in 1945 into a South Africa which still bore the remnants of support for Nazi Germany.¹⁸³ Suttner's grandparents originated from Lithuania and England, and although his family did attend *shul*, Suttner says this was not consistent.¹⁸⁴ His family were involved in Judaism for the social and cultural aspects, and the humanist values Suttner was taught by his parents did not have a specifically Jewish value dimension. "I think that they were aware of being Jewish, but they didn't see their political actions as being a result of being Jewish".¹⁸⁵ Suttner writes that he felt most acutely Jewish when faced with antisemitism. "I am Jewish. I'm fairly culturally aware of being Jewish, but I don't wake up in the morning as Raymond Suttner saying 'I am Jewish'. I don't have a real high consciousness of being Jewish. Others seem to have more consciousness of my being Jewish than I do".¹⁸⁶ Suttner says he never felt that he should marry a Jew, and that his girlfriends have not been Jewish.¹⁸⁷ A feeling of brotherhood that extended beyond Jewry is therefore evident in Suttner's sense of 'Jewishness'.

In prison, Suttner writes that his 'Jewishness' was thrust upon him by others as, "Returning again to the theme that I said in the beginning, that Freud says somewhere that he's Jewish as long as antisemitism constitutes him that way. My Jewishness was relevant to the detainers. For the people who detained me my being Jewish was an essential element of criminality".¹⁸⁸ Suttner has no problem with ethnically organised groups who seek to sustain themselves, but warns that their 'meaning' should never remain static. "I think it's very important for collectives to associate themselves with the

¹⁸² I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 19

¹⁸³ Ibid. pg. 497

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. pg. 502

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. pg. 502

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. pg. 503

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. pg. 503

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. pg. 507

most progressive trends in the development of the situation”.¹⁸⁹ Suttner does just this by following in the footsteps of the radical tradition within Judaism, one which extends back from the times of Abraham and Moses through to the anti-apartheid activists of Jewish origin.

One figure who is synonymous with Jewish identification with the underdog is Ronnie Kasrils. It was whilst reading a book by Shalom Aleichem that Kasrils believes he may have figured out the *shtetl* from which his family originates.¹⁹⁰ Kasrils paternal grandfather Nathan Kasrils immigrated to Kimberley, South Africa in the 1870s.¹⁹¹ “I have this image of the young Yiddish immigrant from Lithuania being asked in a strange language what his name is, and he thinks they’re asking him where he was born so he answers ‘Kasrielefka’ and the immigration official takes the usual short-cut and simplifies the spelling. So I’m a Kasriel which, according to Shalom Aleichem, means a happy pauper, jolly pauper”.¹⁹²

It was after his father’s death that Kasrils met with Eli Weinberg and learnt of his own socialist pedigree. “‘Your father Issy was a socialist,’ Eli told me, much to my surprise. It turns out that my father, who was a commercial traveller ... was also a member of Eli’s trade union, which had many Jewish members ... during my school holidays I used to travel with my father on his rounds. Many of his customers were Chinese and Indian shopkeepers and I was proud of the mutual respect between him and them”.¹⁹³ This family life gave Kasrils a positive model on race relations and a liberal worldview growing up. The East European immigrant milieu therefore exerts a great influence on the shaping of Kasrils’ identity. In an interview, Kasrils quipped that “It is true that I like calling myself a ‘Yeoville boykie’. Yeoville in the forties and early fifties was my medina [Hebrew, literally ‘state’ but used colloquially in Yiddish to mean ‘my turf’] and those rumbustious school-days gave me a zest for life”.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 511

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, pg. 274

¹⁹¹ Ibid, pg. 274

¹⁹² Ibid, pg. 274

¹⁹³ Ibid, pg. 278

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, pg. 288

Kasrils recalls making the links between Jewish struggles and those in South Africa, and that these assertions were given credit by his mother. “When I drew the parallels between Jews in Europe under Nazi rule and the way black people were being treated in our country, I found she was prepared to agree. This honest response to a six-year-old’s questions left it’s mark”.¹⁹⁵ Kasrils is a classic example of the ‘non-Jewish Jew’.

Although not religious, aspects of Judaism have certainly touched Kasrils’ life. “The aspects of Judaism which had always somehow struck a chord with me have been what I broadly term the humanistic aspect, the message of the Prophets, having concern for human beings, for your neighbour, sanctity of life, as opposed to the tribal aspects of ‘smite your enemy’”.¹⁹⁶

Describing his shift away from close identification with Israel and the War of Independence, Kasrils writes that his gratitude for Israel’s survival was replaced by a sentiment of the meaninglessness of religion after his bar mitzvah and he “became a South African” interested in issues of racial inequality.¹⁹⁷ Kasrils was propelled into the Communist party during the time following the Sharpeville massacre. Through his cousin in Durban, Jackie Arenstein, Kasrils was introduced to the Communist Party and had an immediate rapport with its members, many of whom were Jewish.¹⁹⁸ “So that young boy, his eyes focused on Israel’s battle to survive, emerged as a young man fully involved in the Struggle”.¹⁹⁹ Despite this shift in focus, from Israel to an essentially non-Jewish struggle, Kasrils had within him an innate sense of ‘Jewishness’.

Many aspects of Jewish life never left him. He laments the fact that he never learned the animated language of Yiddish, which he had an affinity towards as a child for, “what language has invented better terms than *ganste macher*, *schlemiel*, and *ganif*?”²⁰⁰ Kasrils also missed Yiddish food whilst he was in exile, in particular, “the delicatessen repertoire

¹⁹⁵ R. Kasrils. (1993) *Armed and Dangerous: My Undercover Struggle Against Apartheid* (United Kingdom: Heinemann), pg. 10

¹⁹⁶ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 273

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. pg. 275

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. pg. 276

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. pg. 276

²⁰⁰ Ibid. pg. 272

of chopped liver, pickled cucumber, gefilte fish with *chrane* [horseradish], and my mother's potato lakes".²⁰¹ Kasrils also appreciated Yiddish humour. "My maternal grandfather, Abe Cohen, was a great exponent".²⁰² Here, Kasrils also hints to the fact that many of the key political people he surrounded himself with were Jewish. Despite this love of Yiddish culture, Kasrils did not spend much time reflecting upon Jewish issues. "When, as a kid, I reflected on the pain and suffering around me, and heard from relatives about the Holocaust and Nazi barbarism, it affected me strongly. But going into high school I became very active in sport and that sort of consumed me as politics did later".²⁰³ The historical memory of suffering and the position of Jews in society, created an increased awareness of injustice within Kasrils.

Interestingly, Kasrils has a perception of himself that lies within an essentially Jewish framework. "The Maccabi spirit ... that has always appealed to me ... although I have also been a poet in my life. But that's the thing about people of action, you find both qualities in one individual. If you look at David he has both – he is both David the poet, writer of psalms and the layer of the lyre, a very soft David, and then, by contrast, the warrior, the warrior king. I have an affinity for that sort of human complexity".²⁰⁴ Kasrils sees this duality of characteristics embodied in both Rabin and Arafat, and stated that he himself loves peace but understand that sometimes war is necessary to protect life.²⁰⁵

Kasrils recalls an insight he made as a young boy faithfully reading newspaper coverage of the events of both the Second World War and Israel's War of Independence and asking his mother why the Nazis were behaving as they did to the Jewish people.²⁰⁶ "I had drawn a parallel with South Africa and said but we are behaving in the same way to black people here. And my mother, who was a very naïve, warm and lovely person, still is, aged 87, agreed with me".²⁰⁷ Kasrils quotes the prophet Ezekiel who preached to those

²⁰¹ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 272

²⁰² Ibid. pg. 272

²⁰³ Ibid. pg. 273

²⁰⁴ Ibid. pg. 274

²⁰⁵ Ibid. pg. 275

²⁰⁶ Ibid. pg. 275

²⁰⁷ Ibid. pg. 275

who have strayed from the path and the need to adapt life to new circumstances.²⁰⁸ “He says, find yourself a new heart and a new spirit if you wish to survive. When I read this it struck me as being so apposite for our times – here in South Africa for white people or, for that matter, for Israelis and Palestinians ... so I do find a relevance in Judaic culture”.²⁰⁹ Kasrils in this way places himself with the tradition of the Jewish rebel overturning a corrupt status quo and fixing the world through *tikkun olam* and social justice.

Kasrils clearly rejects the exclusivity of Jewish identity however, broadening his scope of ‘cultural modalities’, and including Western, secularised and even Christian motifs into his life.²¹⁰ “My sister was startled when we named our son Christopher, but Jesus of Nazareth, Christ ‘the anointed one’, was a Jewish prophet ... I view him as a revolutionary of his time in the Jewish struggle against Roman imperialism”.²¹¹ Much of Jewish culture does not appeal to Kasrils. “The Judaism I learned at Hebrew school was taught with no relevance to life around me in South Africa ... Once I was attracted to the liberation struggle, its rhythms and celebratory events took over. I never denied my Jewish origin, however ... I have no identity problem”.²¹² However, the vestigial impact of ‘Jewishness’ is clear in his radicalism.

Although childhood exposure to, and connection with, religiosity differed greatly amongst these radicals, from the deeply religious Podbrey to Kasrils who was irreligious even as a very young child, it is apparent that the historical memory of the notions of *tikkun olam*, *tzedakah* and a concern for the oppressed was fused with a profound sense of ‘Jewishness’ within these radicals. Whether learnt in *cheyder*, in the case of Arenstein and Alexander, or revealed through stories of Biblical heroes as told to Turok and Adler, these Jews all operated in the Eastern European Jewish environment, which combined Jewish identity with radicalism and identified itself with some aspect of the Jewish tradition. In recollecting either their own personal suffering, or the tribulations of their

²⁰⁸ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 273

²⁰⁹ Ibid. pg. 273

²¹⁰ Ibid. pg. 278-279

²¹¹ Ibid. pg. 279

²¹² Ibid. pg. 279

parents generation, these Jews also carried with them the vestigial impact of the distress of Jewish people as the prejudiced 'other' in society. It is arguably this burden, or blessing, as well as the sense of 'Jewishness' bound in Jewish notions of social activism and justice for all, that motivated radical Jews in South Africa to fight against the racism of apartheid.

Seeking Justice

Emerging from the heart of this Eastern European immigrant world, the Jewish radicals of South Africa soon shed any external symbols of Judaism, but retained the residue of the humanist and cosmopolitan aspects of the Jewish tradition. Possessing the secularised Jewish notions of *tzedakah* and *tikkun olam*, these Jews were propelled into radical activism for those suffering in South Africa. This band of radicals, the 'non-Jewish Jews' of this dissertation, "tended to express their Jewish identity less in religious observance than through their secular commitment to 'repairing the world' through struggles for social justice".²¹³ The 'non-Jewish Jews' of South Africa put the Jewish concern for the universal struggles of the underdog around the world into action by embracing a sense of 'Jewishness' in terms of the tradition of rebelling against a corrupt status quo.

Slovo never denied his roots and despite stating firmly that he wanted a secular funeral, the Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris gave a touching tribute to him at that occasion, and accentuated the link between 'Jewishness' and a duty to reach out to others.²¹⁴ Harris asserted that it was the fact that Slovo had been exposed to degradation and the misery of prejudice during his childhood in Lithuania that, "in the South Africa that he grew to love, he determined that no one should be singled out for unfair treatment for no proper reason".²¹⁵ This hints towards his natural kindness towards humanity and the important vestigial impact of his own experiences of oppression as a young Jew in Eastern Europe. This aspect of Slovo's life may be seen as a secularization of the Jewish value of

²¹³ I. Berger. (2004). 'Introduction', pg. 7

²¹⁴ J. Slovo. (1995). *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography*. pg. 201

²¹⁵ Ibid. pg. 202

tzedakah, a responsibility to carry out justice, and *tikkun olam*, the imperative to repair the world through loving kindness and good deeds.

These radicals were greatly concerned with issues of justice, specifically for the underdog. Podbrey's active participation in politics was largely due to her 'Jewish tradition'.²¹⁶ "The role of the Jew in history", she maintains, "the need to fight for freedom, to demand justice, to oppose oppression".²¹⁷ Podbrey was repulsed by the racial injustices in South Africa from a young age. Growing up in the Bundist immigrant world, Podbrey was "moved by the need for social justice in this country, the unfairness of the system, the blatant discrimination. I resolved then and there to dedicate my life to the Party, which I did until the Party and I parted ways many years later".²¹⁸ Podbrey was repulsed by the racial injustices in South Africa and felt the legacy of her heritage, with its great emphasis on justice, obliged her to take a stand for the underdog.

In discussions on the journey to South Africa, Pauline was introduced to the conditions in South Africa by a young nun. She writes, "I too hated injustice and wished I could do something about it ... I resolved to find some other way of expressing my sense of outrage".²¹⁹ Another incident lodged in her memory is of her mother feeding a man who came to their home looking for work "'He looks hungry' she said and motioned him in. He refused to enter the house and squatted outside where Mother presented him with a doorstep sandwich and a huge mug of tea. The Piccones turned away in open disapproval clicking their tongues. Father, the acclimatised South African, was visibly embarrassed".²²⁰ Sympathy for others was a value inculcated within Podbrey's worldview, born from personal and family experience, and motivated her along the path of radical activism.

Podbrey was plagued throughout her life by the issue of how 'Jewishness' should influence one's behaviour and actions. In an incident in which Ilse Dadoo, the wife of a

²¹⁶ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 64

²¹⁷ Ibid. pg. 64

²¹⁸ Ibid. pg. 51

²¹⁹ P. Podbrey. (1993). *White Girl in Search of the Party*. pg. 3

²²⁰ Ibid. pg. 5

stalwart of the anti-apartheid struggle, hissed the words 'Dirty Jewish Prostitute' at the Jewish lawyer for the state, Podbrey was faced with the dilemma of whether to resent this comment or not. "Is it permissible for a non-Jew, I wondered, to imply that a certain unacceptable behaviour is linked to Jewishness, that the two are related?"²²¹ Podbrey asked herself whether Jews should demand of themselves a more noble conscience by virtue of their 'Jewishness' or if this would indicate a sense of arrogance. "And yet ... I do expect of Jews a greater sympathy for the oppressed, a sharper sensitivity to pain, a fellow-feeling for the outsider, the persecuted, the vulnerable".²²² Podbrey saw Jews as the heirs to a history of prejudice, and believes that this legacy gave her the obligation to stand against oppression and inequality in South Africa.

Podbrey admits to Suttner that her 'Jewishness' led her to feel an increased responsibility and higher standard of morality towards those also suffering.²²³ "Maybe it is but I still think because of our Jewish past and our Jewish history and our Jewish experiences of discrimination we should be more sympathetic to the plight of people who are going through the same experiences. I do think we have a special responsibility".²²⁴ She recalls an uncle whose attitude was that Jews must not be concerned with the struggles of others.²²⁵ Podbrey states, "That used to really rile me. I believed that because I'm a Jew it has to do with me. Whoever is attacked, it's me. I'm the victim as well".²²⁶ She continues, "That has been a thread running through my entire life, this feeling that I'm stepping out of line and people are disapproving because it could have negative consequences for others in the community. But I think that by not aligning yourself with the oppressed that you are betraying the Jewish tradition".²²⁷ Podbrey's sense of 'Jewishness', rooted in the vestigial impact of her people's historical persecution, bred a deep compassion for those in distress.

²²¹ P. Podbrey, (1993). *White Girl in Search of the Party*, pg. 126

²²² Ibid, pg. 127

²²³ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 69

²²⁴ Ibid, pg. 69

²²⁵ Ibid, pg. 70

²²⁶ Ibid, pg. 70

²²⁷ Ibid, pg. 70

Similarly, Alexander's Jewish upbringing moulded an individual who was highly motivated to fight the unjust system she encountered in South Africa. "The fact that African men and women did not have the right to vote was atrocious to me, and I was in wholehearted support of a Black Republic ... it was a ray of hope for freedom and equality with other peoples".²²⁸ Alexander felt the effects of the racist laws of South Africa in her personal life, fuelling her own fight for democracy – the quota laws threatened to prohibit her mother from immigrating to South Africa and Alexander was exposed to racist slurs against her ethnicity.²²⁹ Yet, she loved South Africa. Alexander recalls writing to her boyfriend who at that time was still in Riga. "I wrote to Edgar, telling him that although I was not in love with another man, I was indeed 'in love' with the people here, the country and the struggle against race discrimination, which, I explained, is the same as anti-Semitism".²³⁰ In drawing a comparison between the struggles against antisemitism and apartheid, Alexander made the concerns of others her own, and universalised the struggles she had encountered in Latvia as a young Jew to those taking place within the South Africa context.

Alexander pursued a strategy of unwavering non-racial political organising in trade union work throughout her life, and felt the legacy of racial inclusiveness to be the most important achievement of the South African Communist Party.²³¹ Alexander recounts scolding her landlord who had spoken harshly to the domestic worker, making her cry. By speaking out in a case of everyday racism, she threatened the security of her family's residency in the flat but revealed her great conviction that all people should be treated equally regardless of their social position. Alexander states, "I went down, spoke to Mrs Hoffenberg in German and told her that she should be ashamed for insulting her domestic worker who was born there. I told her domestic servant not to cry because she hadn't committed any crime by being black".²³² Injustice against others was an issue close to Alexander's heart, and she stood up against the corrupt status quo of her day in the same vein as the childhood Biblical heroes she had encountered in *cheyder*.

²²⁸ R. Alexander, (2004). *All My Life and All My Strength*, pg. 58

²²⁹ Ibid, pg. 162

²³⁰ Ibid, pg. 81

²³¹ I. Berger, (2004). 'Introduction', pg. 9

²³² I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 33

Hirson's Jewish identity also moulded his entry into racial social activism. He highlights his early exposure to the political Left, a preference typical for immigrants and Jews at that time, and the influence of his family on shaping his views. Referring to his uncle, he writes, "his active involvement in politics has overtones that reached into my home ... during my childhood and youth the words 'socialism' and even 'Communism' were mentioned sympathetically and I heard the names of prominent South African socialists and Communists in conversations".²³³ Hirson was then nurtured in the tradition of Eastern European radical Jewish political thought, which was a secularization of Jewish values and a cultural identity passed on through the generations. The strained family life, with a silent father who maintained no ties to his extended family, was unusual for a Jewish home but made Hirson an example of a 'borderer' from his family and community. From this situation emerges the desire to overturn a corrupt monopoly of thought, an act which Hirson sought to achieve through his political involvement in the struggle.

At the time of his incarceration, Hirson writes that eight out of the twenty-five prisoners at Pretoria Local were Jewish.²³⁴ This was a high percentage, and the members of the Special Branch made no secret of their racism. "'Why are so many of you Jews' they demanded. The answer was neither simple nor easy. We were non-Jewish Jews, Jews who did not accept the religion or even the customs of the Jewish people. Yet we had no reason to deny that we were Jewish, and with my name, which I had adopted in 1940, I proclaimed my Jewishness. Eli Weinberg, the epitome of non-Jewish Jewishness, sang in the choir of the major Johannesburg shul, although he never hid his atheism".²³⁵

'Jewishness' as the secularized values of the Jewish tradition, transformed in modernity into the theories of Marxism, exerted an influence of the radicalism of this generation. Writing about the his fellow Jewish political prisoners, Hirson states that, "The ethnic origin and classlessness, the studentship and professionalism, the political awareness and

²³³ B. Hirson. (1995). *Revolutions in My Life*, pg. 17

²³⁴ Ibid. pg. 94

²³⁵ Ibid. pg. 94

the presence in prison were not entirely disconnected, at least in my case, from being born a Jew. It was a Jewishness that denied many of its attributes, but there was a residue, harking back to some past that helped mark out the trajectory along which I journeyed".²³⁶ 'Jewishness' obviously held sway in motivating these 'non-Jewish Jews' of the immigrant generation to dedicate their lives to the struggle for freedom and equality in South Africa. Whilst some activists are less expressive in acknowledging the motivations of their radicalism, the influence of a Jewish heritage and the impact of life in the Eastern European immigrant setting, can be seen to have moulded these individual's political persuasions.

Eastern European radicalism may be seen in many ways as the secularization of Judaism. From incorporating the illustrious tradition of social criticism in the Hebrew Bible to drawing upon the Talmudic institution of 'communal provision' or social collectivism, these radical movements expressed much of Jewish thought in the modern era.²³⁷ As a people with a distrust of absolute power, packed into the teeming radical world of industrialised towns, the Jewish sense of discrimination was always active and spurred on by the treatment of Jews in Eastern Europe by the Tsarist regime.²³⁸

Hirson too transcended the world of traditional Jewry, and as someone on the margins of his culture and race, was radicalised to rebuild society from a point of justice and equality for all. The links here between Zionism and the situation of oppression that existed for the majority of South Africans is implicitly made by Hirson. For these Jewish radicals, the underdog around the world was to be protected. The Jewish value of the 'vulnerability principle' is therefore applied outside the Jewish world and to majority of oppressed South Africans and to the Palestinians whose lives were disrupted with the creation of the state of Israel.

Rather than familial political ties, it was the history of Jewish oppression that gave Sachs a sense of being outside the 'master race' or 'natural establishment'. This bred a great,

²³⁶ B. Hirson, (1995). *Revolutions in My Life*, pg. 97

²³⁷ P. Johnson, (1987) *A History of the Jews*, pg. 355

²³⁸ Ibid. pg. 357

“sensitivity to suffering, to discrimination, an ability to understand what it’s like for people who are having assumptions made about their patterns of behaviour, about their lifestyles, and about who they are”.²³⁹ Sachs identified with the fact that his family were part of the group destined for extermination, and this touched him deeply.²⁴⁰ Sachs stated that he is distressed not only by the Holocaust being brought into every kind of debate but also when it is used as a reason to justify inaction against apartheid, against injustices around the world.²⁴¹ Sachs also makes the point that the Holocaust should not be seen as unique suffering as “suffering is suffering, persecution is persecution”.²⁴² Here Sachs’ radical cosmopolitanism and universalism is illuminated. For Sachs and the apartheid government, ‘Jewishness’ indeed had even a superficial link to activism and radicalism. “There was that simple assumption that if a white opposes apartheid he or she had to be a Jew”.²⁴³ Therefore, however tenuously and in whatever guise, a certain ‘Jewishness’ and level Jewish identity not only existed within these radicals throughout their lives but clearly motivated this immigrant generation to take up revolutionary activism.

Importantly, Sachs casts his own struggles and motivation to partake in the anti-apartheid struggle in terms of the lives of the Jewish prophets. “The quest to ‘make sense’ of suffering, wounding, and premature death is as old as Job, and as fraught with moral ambiguity ... just as Job steadfastly refuses the temptation to self-blame, insisting he was a just man, Albie Sachs eloquently protests that he and the ANC comrades suffered “because we were good, because we were on the side of angels””.²⁴⁴

Whether their Jewish identity was explicitly linked to a religious understanding of Judaism or whether it was based on a secular Yiddish culture, the humanist tradition of Jewish social and ethical values which has stretched throughout history was imparted to these radicals and shaped their worldview. Importantly, the legacy of Jewish history which is filled with suffering and prejudice, bore a sensitivity to oppression in these ‘non-

²³⁹ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 362

²⁴⁰ Ibid. pg. 361

²⁴¹ Ibid. pg. 361

²⁴² Ibid. pg. 361

²⁴³ Ibid. pg. 360

²⁴⁴ N. Scheper-Hughes, (1990). ‘Introduction to the New Edition’ in Sachs, A. (1990) *The Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter* (Great Britain: Grafton Books), pg. xvii

Jewish Jews' and made them sympathetic to the underdog around the world – in a very 'Jewish' way.

Adler was motivated to radical activism by his family's great social commitment, particularly his mother's compassion for the underprivileged, and their ferocious protection of each other's wellbeing.²⁴⁵ As a young boy Adler would often help his father out in several of their family shops, thereby having exposure to a working class milieu. The experience of an 'intensely political' family was fundamental in motivating Adler to join the anti-apartheid struggle as it introduced him to many aspects of South African life that were usually hidden from white South Africa.²⁴⁶ "My father had political views which were about equality, and fiercely anti-racist, and he also had a profound understanding of the nature of people".²⁴⁷ These values are seen in Adler's life work. Adler writes that his father, "always used to say that one of the problems with communism was people weren't good enough for it".²⁴⁸ This humanism was contained within the family's communist doctrine.

Adler comments on his father's passionate loyalty to Communism and Stalin, and that this is something he has seen replicated in his own trade union work.²⁴⁹ Adler was also influenced considerably by his older brother, who took him as a young boy to the university library with him. "He was quite involved in Nusas [National Union of South African Students] and student politics generally, and so from quite early on I was meeting radical political students from different race groups, going into the black townships like Alexandra, going with Ray's husband, Michael Harmel, the general secretary of the South African Communist Party".²⁵⁰ Adler operated from the start in a radical Jewish scene, and this became the path along which his activism unfolded, following in the great humanist and universal traditions of justice in Judaism.

²⁴⁵ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 10

²⁴⁶ Ibid. pg. 11

²⁴⁷ Ibid. pg. 10

²⁴⁸ Ibid. pg. 10

²⁴⁹ Ibid. pg. 11

²⁵⁰ Ibid. pg. 10

Like Adler, Suttner was motivated towards radicalism in the home, growing up in a liberal environment where both parents belonged to the Progressive Party. “And that commitment wasn’t so much to the Progressive Party as a general commitment to humanism, to a concern for the downtrodden – for a sense of justice and a desire to see this injustice ended”.²⁵¹ Until the late 1960s, Suttner worked within a liberal milieu but then came to believe that liberalism was not able to bring about the change needed in South Africa, despite its humanist values and moral attitudes.²⁵² Social justice and oppression of others was dear to Suttner’s heart from a remarkably early age.

It was Suttner’s parents who instilled these important moral values in him, such as honesty and unselfishness.²⁵³ These concepts which are arguably rooted from the traditions of *tzedakah* and *tikkun olam*, informed his worldview and relationships in his political and personal lives.²⁵⁴ “I grew up in a family of five children... and we had lots of debates ... I think what I do owe to my family is the basic core values”.²⁵⁵ Suttner believes that he is not a Jewish activist but an activist who happens to be Jewish, the tension between the particular and the universal undoubtedly exposed in this ‘non-Jewish Jew’. “It’s very hard for me to put myself in the shoes of someone who defines themselves as a Jewish activist ... I want to explain the reasons for my choices: the psychological factors that went into it, part of which is being Jewish”.²⁵⁶ Clearly Suttner gives at least some import to his ‘Jewishness’ as a factor in his radicalism.

For Turok, the link between ‘Jewishness’ and activism is more explicit. Turok writes, “No doubt my conversion to non-racialism was greatly assisted by the nature of my origins”.²⁵⁷ Turok believes that his ability to shatter so many collective customs lies in a childhood surrounded by the idiosyncrasies of his parents’ Eastern European immigrant background and outsider status, as well as their ideology of Jewish radicalism. “They were by no means ordinary South Africans. Their circle included many progressives,

²⁵¹ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 499

²⁵² Ibid, pg. 500

²⁵³ Ibid, pg. 501

²⁵⁴ Ibid, pg. 501

²⁵⁵ Ibid, pg. 501

²⁵⁶ Ibid, pg. 516

²⁵⁷ B. Turok, (2003). *Nothing But the Truth*, pg. 13

socialists, hybrid communists and more than a few eccentrics – individualists one and all. Their ‘togetherness’ was rooted in their foreignness, but there was also a measure of common ground”.²⁵⁸ Turok’s mother collected funds for ‘The Guardian’, the Communist Party newspaper; both parents were proud of Sam Kahn’s achievements as the first communist Member of Parliament; and visiting sailors from the Soviet Union who stopped in Cape Town were shown hospitality in the Turok family home.²⁵⁹ Hillel, Turok’s brother, had joined the communist party whilst Turok was a student, and he remembers his brother preparing to fight the fascist supporters on the Johannesburg City Hall steps.²⁶⁰ “I absorbed this libertarian atmosphere, though at a distance, for I could not be part of their world. It was unreal, alien and could never win my adherence though, insofar as their discussions touched South Africa”.²⁶¹ Turok took his position as an outsider to the community at large, and even his own family, and used the Jewish radical environment of his childhood to expand Jewish concerns into the anti-apartheid context.

Turok was introduced to Marx, Engels and Lenin in his teenage years through literature found in his home. “Although my father was far from being a revolutionary or communist, Marxism was not an alien creed and was accorded a certain degree of awe and respect. So one can say that I was actually socialised into leftist politics though it was some years before my commitment became serious”.²⁶² Turok moved in Jewish communist circles, joining a Marxist study group under Jack Simons.²⁶³ “And so it was that I absorbed left-wing culture, developed a rebellious streak and independence of mind which brought me into frequent conflict with my more conventional friends. It also prepared me for my role as a future white dissident, at odds with the community and in constant conflict with the regime”.²⁶⁴ Turok rebelled from the traditional Jewish and non-Jewish worlds, fighting against social conventions and seeking to challenge archaic regimes, like the Jewish Prophets who came before him.

²⁵⁸ B. Turok, (2003). *Nothing But the Truth*, pg. 22

²⁵⁹ Ibid. pg. 22

²⁶⁰ Ibid. pg. 42

²⁶¹ Ibid. pg. 22-23

²⁶² Ibid. pg. 23

²⁶³ Ibid. pg. 30

²⁶⁴ Ibid. pg. 42

Turok's Jewish identity was greatly influenced in Latvia, with its heightened racial tension. "We lived in a Jewish area and went to a Jewish school where the instruction was in Yiddish. Unfortunately, the school abutted on a square with non-Jewish schools and fights between groups of racially defined boys became commonplace".²⁶⁵ Turok continues that one incident in particular, "haunted me for many years".²⁶⁶ At the age of five years old, Turok and his brothers were accosted on a mole along a beachfront. "A group of small boys approached from the end of the mole ... the biggest picked up some stones, threw one at my brother and called out, 'Jude, Jude!' (Jew!). There were six of them and only three of us. We turned and fled with the boys following, jeering at us".²⁶⁷ Turok recalls many such incidents of antisemitism which left a lifelong impression upon him. Turok writes that because of being Jewish he realised that besides skin colour, "for most of my life I have been aware of the fact that I am easily identified as being of Jewish origin. Afrikaners, especially in the rural areas, readily ask: 'Turok? That is a foreign name. You look Jewish.' This, in a joking, semi-accusatory manner".²⁶⁸ These incidents gave Turok first hand experience in prejudice, and granted him a heightened sympathy for the plight of other's oppression and pain.

Apart from the burgeoning racism in Latvia, Turok was also greatly influenced by the escalating radical political activity during this period.²⁶⁹ "The harbour was the scene of one spectacular event when a ship flying a swastika was attacked by a group of Jewish comrades who tore down the flag, smeared the ship with black paint and made off on motorbikes".²⁷⁰ Turok therefore had previous experience of living in an authoritarian state, and witnessed first hand resistance to this oppression. Relieved to have moved to South Africa, he writes that at the time "no one informed us that we were migrating from one fascist country to another".²⁷¹

²⁶⁵ B. Turok, (2003). *Nothing But the Truth*, pg. 14

²⁶⁶ Ibid. pg. 14

²⁶⁷ Ibid. pg. 15

²⁶⁸ Ibid. pg. 15

²⁶⁹ Ibid. pg. 15

²⁷⁰ Ibid. pg. 15

²⁷¹ Ibid. pg. 16

Kasrils too was motivated to empathise with the downtrodden through his place in society, and historical legacy, as a Jew. “So this awareness, the empathy for human beings, lived with me from a very early stage”.²⁷² For Kasrils, the meaning of his ‘Jewishness’ “emerges from the humanist ethic of Judaism, the appeal to justice and tolerance, and the Holocaust”.²⁷³ Shocked that some Jews do not interpret their being Jewish with its history of oppression as giving Jews a special responsibility to help others who are repressed, Kasrils says “I always took the injunction of loving one’s fellow human beings as oneself to heart”.²⁷⁴ Kasrils continues that “it’s an important part of being a decent human being, or striving to be one. I am positive about people, their life force. This is the Judaism in me – the belief that human life has tremendous value, that human beings can soar to the clouds irrespective of the barbarity they can sink to. I’ve found that in life”.²⁷⁵

In the 1960s when Kasrils was active within the Congress of Democrats, the Communist Party and the MK, he was surrounded by a handful of Jews who were very politically active.²⁷⁶ The Jewish aspect of the Communist Party lay within its history, according to Kasrils. “You had all these wonderful stories about the generation of the twenties and thirties, memorable individuals who had come from Eastern Europe. Rowley Arenstein and Joe Slovo loved talking about those characters”.²⁷⁷

Kasrils sees a direct link between Jewish identity, particularly the legacy of a secularised and universal humanist notion of justice, as responsible for Jewish radicalism. Reflecting on the phenomenon of Jewish radicals, Kasrils writes, “These are individuals who are actually products of that community ... I think every single one of them is in some way a product of that humanist tradition which I referred to. I think its’ strong and goes very deep”.²⁷⁸ Kasrils believes that so many Jews were drawn to the South African Communist Party as a result of both the wave of immigration of working-class Jews from Eastern

²⁷² I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 275

²⁷³ Ibid, pg. 270

²⁷⁴ Ibid, pg. 270

²⁷⁵ Ibid, pg. 270-271

²⁷⁶ Ibid, pg. 272

²⁷⁷ Ibid, pg. 272

²⁷⁸ Ibid, pg. 281

Europe who imported socialist radicalism and the revolutionary ideas they had been exposed to; and the effects of World War Two and the fight against fascism abroad and in South Africa.²⁷⁹ Kasrils was therefore introduced to the internationalism of radical Jewish thought through his connections to the previous immigrant generation.

One may turn to Kasrils to sum up the Jewish motivation to seek justice. “One sees a number of Jews are involved in intellectual, political, media, and professional life in a very positive humanistic way ... so that humanistic strand of Jewish identity is still there, is still vibrant ... it says a tremendous amount about the deep roots of the Jewish community in this country that the involvement is still there”.²⁸⁰ With a sense of identity stemming from the Eastern European Jewish immigrant world and an exposure to the great traditions of justice in Judaism, the lives of these radical Jews arguably upheld by the imperatives of *tzedakah* and *tikkun olam*, and put the Jewish concern for the universal struggles of the underdog around the world into action. A sense of ‘Jewishness’ arguably motivated these radicals to stand against the prejudices and discrimination which defined apartheid South Africa. The historical memory of the suffering of their parents’ people may be seen to have inspired radical Jewry to feel a responsibility to stand up and speak out in the South African context. For these ‘non-Jewish Jews’, the only aspect of Jewish identity they embraced openly was linked to tradition of rebelling against a corrupt status quo.

Cosmopolitanism and Anti-Zionism

The ‘non-Jewish Jews’ of South Africa brought the notion of justice in the Jewish tradition into the modern era through secularising these concepts and conveying them beyond Jewry. By moving from the particular to the universal, these radicals shed their outward ‘Jewishness’ whilst still retaining the innate values of justice in Judaism. In the modern era, this ‘Jewishness’ is arguably embodied in the radical structures of thought created by Jews after the failure of the Enlightenment. Most notably, Marxism

²⁷⁹ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 270

²⁸⁰ Ibid. pg. 271

secularised Jewish notions of social activism, justice and messianic longing, and took many Jewish notions and applied them to the human race. Following a belief within Judaism that dates back to the time of the Prophets, radicals Jews in South Africa were greatly occupied with a cosmopolitan understanding of justice, and were drawn to the struggle of the underdog across the globe. These radicals immersed themselves in the anti-apartheid struggle. Within the Jewish radical realm of the anti-apartheid struggle Albie Sachs, “identifies strong international connections as one of the characteristics of progressive Jewish political activity in South Africa”.²⁸¹

These ideas reverberated in the autobiographical literature of radical Jews as well as in their oral recollections. Slovo, for example, was always committed to removing the racist apartheid regime from power and placing power into the hands of the people.²⁸² Slovo highlights the fact that the majority of Jews in South Africa saw little connection between the Jewish ghettos of Europe and the black ones in South Africa.²⁸³ Slovo however, was a cosmopolitan ‘non-Jewish Jew’, and connected the historical memory of the Jewish struggle throughout the ages to the struggle of the underdog around the world, and in South Africa in particular.

Another key figure of cosmopolitanism amongst the Jewish radicals of South Africa was Ray Alexander, whose internationalist perspective caused a stir within the Jewish community even in her school days. Chosen as the speaker for a talk at her high school on the occasion of the opening of the university in Jerusalem, Alexander’s observation that such an occasion should be celebrated regardless of whether the university was opening in Jerusalem or Timbuktu was widely disapproved of.²⁸⁴ Alexander highlighted her belief that no matter where a university was opened, the event would bring better understanding between human beings. When pressed, she notoriously quipped, “What’s your objection to Timbuktu? People are living there too”.²⁸⁵ Alexander was concerned

²⁸¹ I. Berger, (2004). ‘Introduction’, pg. 6

²⁸² N. Mandela, (1995). ‘Foreword’ in Slovo, J. *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography* (South Africa: Ravan Press), pg. vii

²⁸³ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 230

²⁸⁴ Ibid, pg. 27

²⁸⁵ Ibid, pg. 27

with the social and political concerns of people around the world, “Because I felt that I belong to the world. I’m an internationalist, which is true”.²⁸⁶ Belonging to the world shows her secularization and universalization of the Jewish concepts which identify with society’s vulnerable: *tikkun olam* or making the world right, and *tzedakah* or charity and righteousness. Like Deutscher’s ‘non-Jewish Jew’, Alexander takes these ideas and extends them from the particular to the universal.

Another radical who moved from the particular to the universal was Podbrey. She locates her Communist sympathies squarely within a Jewish tradition. “The morality of Judaism, the ethics of the religion, the history of the Jews, the compulsion to remember and to identify – that seems to have been with me for ever”.²⁸⁷ Podbrey continues, “I’ve always felt very conscious of being Jewish, and that my communist sympathies had their roots in Jewish ethics and Jewish morality. I think that the Jewish morality and philosophy of the past had an outlook on life and a sense of justice which doesn’t need any amendment or apologising for. And it can easily lead to what we now call socialism or fairness and justice for all”.²⁸⁸ Podbrey observed this ‘justice for all’ during her years under the Soviet Union. The Jewish identity of the entire leadership of the Communist party in Hungary, as well as the leadership of the radio station where she worked, was denied or hidden in order to avert fears of dual loyalties.²⁸⁹

Podbrey recounts an incident on the job in which she prepared a political commentary using the phrase ‘World Jewry’ to deny anti-Semitism in Czechoslovakia, itself a false assertion. “My immediate supervisor, who had to check on my commentary, said ‘You can’t use this phrase’. And I said ‘Why ever not?’ and he said ‘Oh, because it denotes that there are Jews here who have a common identity with outside Jews. They haven’t. They’re more allied to whatever country they live in’. I said ‘yes, but there are certain issues on which world Jews do unite, and there ‘world Jewry’ is an acceptable term’. As usual we appealed to Istvan and not surprisingly he concurred with Anna. ‘You see,’ he

²⁸⁶ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 44

²⁸⁷ Ibid. pg. 60

²⁸⁸ Ibid. pg. 60

²⁸⁹ Ibid. pg. 53

explained, 'the expression 'world Jewry' has a certain connotation. On the one hand ... on the other hand ...' As he developed his theme it struck me for the first time that Istvan too was Jewish. This kind of Talmudic disputation had only one source – the *cheyder*, the Jewish religious school for boys. In the case why was he, also, so coy about his origins?"²⁹⁰ Indeed Podbrey was even warned against being 'aggressively Jewish' in the Communist circles where Jewish identity was deliberately hidden.²⁹¹ The world of radicalism, whilst fostering a concern for the underdog, generally discouraged any acknowledgement of nationhood or separate ethnicities.

Podbrey makes the links between loyalty to the Party and the phenomenon of adopting a religion. Judaism and Communism arguably synchronise in that one tows the line within the Communist Party, respecting its structures of authority and loyalty and kinship, as one would obey the guidelines of a faith.²⁹² "We would've denied that it was all based on faith and loyalty but a lot of it did rest on that".²⁹³ Here the links between Marxism as a secularization of the Jewish tradition in the modern world are illuminated. The tendency amongst Jewish leftists to be anti-Jewish or non-Jewish is symptomatic of their fear of needing to prove their worth as radicals or leftists. Historically, Jews have been seen as exclusive and yet also condemned as cosmopolitan, and must therefore show that "they have no loyalty except to the Party. And they feel their being Jewish throws doubt on their loyalty".²⁹⁴ This form of self-hatred amongst many Jews was Podbrey says, "embarrassment whenever they are reminded of their 'Jewishness'. They're not comfortable with it, they brush it under the carpet, at best they skate over it and at times they're quite hostile".²⁹⁵ This quote highlights the anti-nationalist sentiments of Marxian theory which, as argued earlier, can be seen as an extension of the Jewish humanist tradition which seeks to create a neutral social space for Jews and others in a equal modern society.

²⁹⁰ P. Podbrey, (1993). *White Girl in Search of the Party*, pg. 181

²⁹¹ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 53

²⁹² Ibid, pg. 57

²⁹³ Ibid, pg. 57

²⁹⁴ Ibid, pg. 68

²⁹⁵ Ibid, pg. 68

Like Podbrey, Sachs was also concerned with a humanistic internationalism from an early age, and in building a society without cleavages. Sachs spent much time as part of the very Jewish 'Modern Youth Society'. "With regard to the Jewish community as an organised community, if people wanted to organise their own schools and their own cultural activities, fine. We had no problem with that. But we were more than engaged in what we were doing".²⁹⁶ Sachs' concerns therefore extended beyond Jewish society and into the anti-apartheid struggle. Asked if he felt like 'the Jew who is in the ANC', Sachs retorted, "I made it plain I wasn't a representative of the Jewish community in the ANC ... I was Albie who'd been with the ANC for many decades and who was a Jew. And if the fact that I was a Jew made it easier for me to establish communication and a two-way flow of ideas, so much the better".²⁹⁷ In this way, Sachs sees himself as an activist rather than a specifically Jewish radical.

Stemming from the heritage of the 'people of the book', Jewish radicals were concerned with knowledge of justice and became practitioners of Marxian theory. Hirson muses on the fact that he became a 'non-Jewish Jew', transcending the constrictions of Jewry. "We had stepped outside the small Jewish community and by our action we had drawn a line that separated us from the South Africa we knew. We were no longer involved in 'white affairs' and because of our Trotskyism we would have to seek other friends and allies in the country".²⁹⁸ In a similar vein, Arenstein tracks Marxism as a secular extension of Jewish cosmopolitanism, "You see the Jewish religion also has something very similar – that was the coming of the Messiah. When the Messiah came, it was taught that all the people who had died would rise. The lion would lie down with the lamb. Everybody would be brothers. Nobody would exploit anybody else. This is what we were taught about the Messiah. And that seemed wonderful. Now Marxism, practically, was the messiah coming. It fitted in with the basic teachings of my mother".²⁹⁹ Both these radicals follow the universal tradition within Judaism, and see it embodied in modern form in the Marxist and radical worlds.

²⁹⁶ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 356

²⁹⁷ Ibid, pg. 357

²⁹⁸ B. Hirson, (1995). *Revolutions in My Life*, pg. 138

²⁹⁹ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 377

Like Arenstein and Hirson before him, Adler writes that in his younger days he discarded any particularistic ethnic basis for society but with time has come to realise how deep these identities go and their great importance to people. Recently, Adler and his wife have introduced some of the rituals of Judaism into their home to ensure their children benefit from the rich culture of Jewish religion. “My son wanted a bar mitzvah so we gave him one, although we made it clear to the rabbi that we were not a religious family”.³⁰⁰ Whilst these concessions to Jewish life are notable, a deep cosmopolitanism characterises Adler’s activism.

Adler’s father had attended yeshiva and possessed a vast knowledge of the Torah, and despite the fact that his father later became an atheist, Adler had a traditional Bar Mitzvah.³⁰¹ In South Africa, Adler’s father threw himself into trade unionism and worked in the Jewish Workers Club. Adler writes that there “would be intense debates about political events, particularly international political events. It was very much an international perspective, with a serious concern about what was happening in Eastern Europe. They were strongly anti-Zionist and fiercely Jewish in an anti-religious way. And that has been something that has grown with me, in the sense that I have always felt a Jewish identity”.³⁰² Clearly, Adler’s personal ideologies and Jewish revolutionary identity is deeply rooted in the family heritage he inherited, and propelled him to challenge the perverted character of South African life.

Adler states that another important aspect of Eastern European life which carried through into his environment was a worldview of internationalism and intellectualism.³⁰³ Adler continues that there are “many South African Jews who I think are parochial, and who profess all the elements of traditional Judaism – they go to shul, they do the rituals, etc – and then sometimes you come across people at the same Paysach *seder* table who are intellectuals with very fine minds, who will quote you poetry etc. That’s the sort of mix

³⁰⁰ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 17

³⁰¹ Ibid. pg. 9

³⁰² Ibid. pg. 10

³⁰³ Ibid. pg. 12

that came through in my family”.³⁰⁴ Adler feels a very strong connection to this phenomena, a connection which he feels he can make anywhere in the world where that element of Jewry which is highly political, culturally and intellectually vigorous exists.³⁰⁵ This transcendental aspect of Jewish culture and values was embodied in many of the radicals, and allowed them to straddle worlds and ideas in order to affect change and bring about equality. On the question of how he felt about Jewish assimilation, Adler maintains that he would not once have worried as he was an internationalist and he saw the distinction of people into separate ethnic groups as one of the world’s greatest problems.³⁰⁶ “I now recognise the value of different cultural systems, and I have come to believe that diversity is an important element in human existence”.³⁰⁷ Adler is himself secure in his ‘Jewishness’ and doesn’t deny his heritage.³⁰⁸

Also following in the footsteps of the prophets, Kasrils writes that he will, “totally reject the ‘chosen people’ idea, but obviously people are created by their history, their inheritance, by their culture ... but I know plenty of people who have always felt this very strong Jewish identity, without being at all religious”.³⁰⁹ Kasrils believes that ‘Jewishness’ is a, “heritage which one has, and I can identify with that heritage”.³¹⁰ However, Kasrils sees the exclusive advancement of one people over others, such as the Afrikaners in South Africa, as leading to racism and prejudice. “The problem that I have with Zionism and even Judaism has been a contradiction and this contradiction I already saw as a young Hebrew pupil at *cheyder*. On the one hand there’s a universality, a preaching of a universal God which is the major contribution of Judaism, as I understand it. Yet this is contradicted by something that as a young person I rejected, the chosen people concept, the exclusivity”.³¹¹

³⁰⁴ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 12-13

³⁰⁵ Ibid. pg. 13

³⁰⁶ Ibid. pg. 18

³⁰⁷ Ibid. pg. 18

³⁰⁸ Ibid. pg. 18

³⁰⁹ Ibid. pg. 274

³¹⁰ Ibid. pg. 274

³¹¹ Ibid. pg. 281

Kasrils relates how this tradition of grappling with the contradictions of Judaism extends back to great Jewish thinkers.³¹² Kasrils recalls asking his Hebrew teacher why only Jews pray for atonement on Yom Kippur, and was unconvinced that the reason was to do with the responsibility of being Jewish.³¹³ Kasrils says that unlike many successful Jews who resent exclusion from Gentile society, and therefore develop an aspiration to assimilate, he didn't wish to deny his identity but rather as a young boy in Hebrew school did not want to feel that Jews were 'special'.³¹⁴ "Therefore apart from an initial little honeymoon with Zionism, which was purely opportunistic – you know, with the Jewish youth movements, being able to get into the various uniforms, meet girls, going to camps like Lakeside [laughs] – you know, once that phase had passed I was totally disinterested".³¹⁵ The contradiction between the particular and the universal is personified in the 'non-Jewish Jews' of South Africa. By shedding their outward 'Jewishness' and immersing themselves in universal concerns, these radicals carry an innate Jewish sense of *tikkun olam*, *tzedakah* and the historical memory of their own people's persecution into contemporary philosophies.

The revolutionary worldview in which these radicals operated was one of cosmopolitanism – a dislike for ethnic particularities and parochialism. Alienated from secular society as well as the Jewish community, Jewish radicals sought to create a world of equality in which they and others could exist as equals and developed revolutionary ideologies such as Marxism as a secularised and universal extension of Judaism. The obligation to fight against injustices, which stemmed from their sense of 'Jewishness' in terms of the notions of justice in the Jewish tradition, led these Jews to take up the struggles of the underdog around the world, and in South Africa in particular. This dislike for nationalisms and ethnic particularities would breed a dislike and ambiguity towards Zionism and the creation of the State of Israel – a controversial characteristic of South Africa's 'non-Jewish Jews'.

³¹² I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 281

³¹³ Ibid. pg. 281

³¹⁴ Ibid. pg. 281

³¹⁵ Ibid. pg. 281

Israel/ Zionism

Within the debate on Jewish radicalism and its motivations, what is not addressed is the corollary to radicalism and cosmopolitanism which is a disdain for ethnic divisions and Jewish nationalism - in other words, Zionism. Emerging from the deep cosmopolitanism and anti-ethnicity of a secularised notion of justice in the Jewish tradition, the Jewish radicals of South Africa developed an ambiguous view of Zionism.

Alexander's internationalism gave birth to her anti-Zionism. An example of her anti-nationalist concerns even as a teenager was the request of a Zionist organisation for Alexander to support the Balfour Declaration in a debate. Alexander writes that after reading up for the debate she "came to the conclusion that the Balfour Declaration would not solve the Jewish problem, that the Jews are all over the world, and Israel, which was then Palestina, cannot absorb all the Jews and what would happen to the Palestinians?"³¹⁶ Alexander's refusal to argue for the declaration at the Zionist event was met with consternation, and she was eventually permitted to attend without participating in the debate itself.³¹⁷ This anti-Zionist episode highlights Alexander's resistance against any attempts at being placed within a 'nation'.

Alexander was associated with the heavily anti-Zionist *Gezerd* picnic group. "The word *Gezerd* derives from a Yiddish phrase meaning Association for Land Labour (Agriculture), an internationalist socialist/ Communist Jewish organisation founded between the world wars and dedicated to the ideal of taking Eastern European Jews out of shop keeping and other petit bourgeois trades and equipping them to work the land".³¹⁸ The internationalism here is a direct result of Alexander's own secular humanist 'Jewishness'.

Slovo's feelings toward Israel and Zionism were equally disparaging. Dolny recalls that, "he noted that freedom which is won through subjugation of others is an unworthy

³¹⁶ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 27

³¹⁷ Ibid, pg. 27

³¹⁸ R. Alexander. (2004). *All My Life and All My Strength*, pg. 59

freedom”.³¹⁹ This quote may be extrapolated from to illuminate the broader sentiments of the radicals of South Africa to Israel and Zionism. Slovo felt that, “looked at in isolation, the kibbutz seemed to be the very epitome of socialist lifestyle ... they were motivated by Owenite passion and the belief that by the mere exercise of will and humanism you can build socialism in one factory or one kibbutz and that the power of its example will sweep the imagination of all men in society, worker or capitalist”.³²⁰ Slovo seems to have a great appreciation for this idealism, but finds the justification for its existence to be unjust. He was firmly against Israel and Zionism, based on his universal sympathy for the underdog.

Slovo saw the formation of the State of Israel as perverting the history of Jewry. He writes that, “ironically enough, the horrors of the Holocaust became the rationalisation for the perpetuation by Zionists of acts of genocide against the indigenous people of Palestine. Those of us who, in the years that were to follow, raised our voices publicly against the violent apartheid of the Israeli state were vilified by the Zionist press”.³²¹ The dissolution of nationalisms into a common identity is a large part of the radical Jewish tradition and meant that whilst Slovo sided with black South Africans, he too sided with the Palestinian people and their struggles in the Middle East. “Social theory aside, the dominating doctrine on this kibbutz, as well as on others, was the biblical injunction that the land of Palestine must be claimed and fought for by every Jew. And this meant (as it did eventually mean) the uprooting and scattering of millions whose people had occupied this land for over 5 000 years, the more’s the pity”.³²² Although Slovo’s empathy for those uprooted seems to overpower his identification with the Jewish state, this is itself part of the tradition of ‘non-Jewish Jews.’³²³

In his youth, Hirson was inspired by this very idealistic conception of reshaping society in a new mould. Motivated by the news of antisemitic outbursts and the murder of Jews

³¹⁹ I. Sutner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 243

³²⁰ J. Slovo. (1995). *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography*, pg. 31

³²¹ Ibid, pg. 31

³²² Ibid, pg. 31

³²³ In contrast to these more unsympathetic views, some radicals later warmed to the notion of Israel and Jewish nationalism in the form of Zionism. For Podbrey, the state of Israel and Zionism has a place in Jewish radical discourse.

because of their ethnic origins, Hirson increased his time spent on Zionist activities and became a member of the *Hashomer Hatzair* or the ‘Young Guardsman’ Zionist youth movement.³²⁴ “This group flew in the face of many of apartheid’s values, preaching equality between the sexes and socialism for Jews. Their members spoke about the role of the kibbutz in building the new society; of co-operative efforts to construct that new society”.³²⁵ Many of the leaders of this Zionist movement wrote extensively on Marx and Marxism, and this influenced Hirson in later years.³²⁶ Being a part of Zionist movements during this time also led Hirson to view, albeit in a refracted light, the struggles of the colonies against European rule.³²⁷ Indeed, most of the Jewish radicals who later became universalists were exposed to radical ideologies within the Zionist youth movement milieu.

Hashomer Hatzair was a ‘crucible of political development’, and the divided discussions on the philosophies of Leftist politics allowed for a greater engagement of various political ideologies.³²⁸ Hirson left the group in the mid-1940s, and soon after rejected Zionism on an internationalist basis. “I also rejected Zionism as ‘colonialist’, and although I endorsed HH’s call for a bi-national state, I did not believe this would be accepted by the Zionist movement”.³²⁹ In a later meeting with members of the Kibbutz Shuval in Israel, Hirson states, “There were contemptuous remarks about Palestinians, in terms not very different from the racist remarks that I knew so well from South Africa, and references to the ‘chosen people’ that also reminded me of South African attitudes”.³³⁰ The cosmopolitanism of the Jewish radical tradition, its universal humanism

³²⁴ B. Hirson, (1995). *Revolutions in My Life*, pg. 92

³²⁵ Ibid, pg. 93

³²⁶ Hashomer Hatzair was a youth movement with the purpose was to recruit and train young people as *chalutzim* or pioneers who would leave their country of origin and travel to Palestine to establish a new settlement or strengthen an existing kibbutz. H. H. not only professed adherence to the ideas of Karl Marx and considered itself further left-wing politically than other kibbutz movements, but stressed socialist ideas and equality of the sexes in its debates on the size and configuration of the collectives. Turning inward, it sought to break the nuclear family and form new social relationships between the sexes and a new concept of ‘togetherness’ that would lead to a socialist pattern of life.

³²⁷ B. Hirson, (1995). *Revolutions in My Life*, pg. 100

³²⁸ Ibid, pg. 125

³²⁹ Ibid, pg. 135

³³⁰ Ibid, pg. 316

and idealistic desire to build a common society, pushed aside nationalist feelings for many Jews.

Whilst 'Jewishness' led Hirson to side with a Zionist organisation and the fight to create a state for Jewry, it was the cosmopolitanism of secularized Jewish values that thrust Hirson away from Zionism. These values created revolutionary theories which sought to strip away nationhood and prejudice. Hirson continues to make an important point, "there were others in the Left, and particularly in the Communist Party, who had once been Zionists, many from the same left-wing Zionist movement as I was. Some had been detained, some were in exile, others had died".³³¹ Many of the Jews involved with Zionism moved on to work in the political world of Stalinism.³³² "It was this Jewishness that propelled many to Marxism and internationalism. Nationalism, with its attachment to land and its appeal to clannishness, was the negation of internationalism: the most precious heritage that Jews brought with them".³³³ Hirson sought to repair the world through social and political ideologies, and saw the obligation of justice in the Jewish tradition as relevant to the world beyond Zionism.

A radical without such a history in the Zionist movements was Sachs. Recalling film reels he watched in Johannesburg in the late 1940s in which the Jews of Europe were fleeing to Palestine, Sachs was shocked to see Jews in tanks. "Until then Jews were seen as the most pacific people in the world".³³⁴ Sach continues that looking back, "it's painful for me because there's a kind of tough, almost universal Jewish aggressiveness that's emerged. An identification with the State of Israel, and a physical aggression that's very pronounced".³³⁵ Sachs believes that many people see the State of Israel as based on tanks, guns, and the use of force, and from that viewpoint understand why many of his friends are strong anti-Zionists. "But I understand where the love and affection and feeling and dedication to Israel for most Jews comes from. I understand what it means for people who have felt themselves oppressed and have been oppressed – historically and in our

³³¹ B. Hirson. (1995). *Revolutions in My Life*, pg. 94

³³² Ibid, pg. 94-95

³³³ Ibid, pg. 94-95

³³⁴ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 351

³³⁵ Ibid, pg. 352

own lifetimes, and subject to all sorts of persecution – how much it means to have the capacity not simply to turn the other cheek; not simply to be humiliated every time. To have a place that you feel is your own. Where you can express yourself in national terms”.³³⁶ From this point of view Sachs has never been able to side with belligerent anti-Zionist positions, and would never call for the destruction of Israel but writes, “If only more Jews could understand that Palestinians have also suffered and also want a national home”.³³⁷ Sachs understands the Jewish national dream, but sees the need for Palestinian self-determination as equally, if not more, important and pressing.

Following from this, it is clear that Sachs and other radicals hold Israel to a separate standard. This prejudice towards Israel and Zionism is seen by some as a ‘self-hatred’, but in many ways it is an extension of the legacy of *Deutscher* and the ‘non-Jewish Jew’. By denigrating their own identity, these Jews may have sought to be accepted by the broader non-Jewish world and rebel against the intimacy of the Jewish world. Leading on from this, Sachs reeled against the views of some Zionists that Jewish South Africans at university should direct their energies towards Zionist organisations rather than the freedom struggle of their country. “It was seen as a choice and it was seen as a loss. Instead of feeling proud of us because we were Jews and we were fighting for freedom and fighting for equality, they asked what had happened to divert us from where we should’ve been”.³³⁸ Although many good friends had joined *Hashomeyr Hatzair*, Sachs wrote, “I resented the fact that people wanted to impose an identity upon me, and to tell me that as a Jew ‘you ought to belong to - ’”.³³⁹ Sachs still riles against being placed within one identity, and as a borderer on the outside of the Jewish community, he feels an ambiguous sense of identification with Israel.

Adler too feels this ambiguity, and frames the problem in this way, “I would still philosophically be against the idea of creating an ethnic state in such a way that it would create conflict, and that’s what happened with Israel. ... Having said that, I realise that

³³⁶ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 352

³³⁷ Ibid. pg. 352

³³⁸ Ibid. pg. 352

³³⁹ Ibid. pg. 352

that would have been a legitimate position in the 1930s and '40s. But in the 1990s context, one has to look at resolving a situation where you have an Israeli state with four million Jews – this is not a situation you can wish away”.³⁴⁰ Adler was, like Sachs, also connected to *Habonim*, but sees this venture as more a social activity than one related to a Zionist ideology.³⁴¹ Although Adler writes that Israel does not give him a sense of pride, he admits that the country does give him a sense of identification at certain times. “Also at times I have a sense of wishing not to identify with it, because it conflicts with my image of what Jewish values are. It’s complex, because it seems to represent both the good and the bad”.³⁴² Adler identifies with Israel as much as he would identify with a Jewish community anywhere in the world. Speaking of Israelis in South Africa, “an image of aggressive, self-interested people, and I ask myself, ‘What went wrong, and why is it that we have to tolerate as part of a Jewish identity people like that?’ Again, I look to sociology to explain it, and I think it’s the impact on these people of a really harsh environment”.³⁴³

Turok states that he feels no affinity towards Israel and Zionism. “Intensely Jewish as our home was, it was never Zionist, a theory and movement totally rejected by my parents’ circle. So early on I learned to distinguish ethnicity as a culture from national chauvinism. I have never changed my views of this and have yet to visit Israel or have any truck with Zionism. Rather, my sympathy lies with the Palestinians”.³⁴⁴ Suttner recognises the right to self-determination of the State of Israel and its “historical reality”.³⁴⁵ However, Suttner doesn’t recognise Israel’s occupation of parts of Syria and “the right to exercise various forms of harassment against non-Jewish sections of the population of Israel itself”.³⁴⁶ Suttner, an explicit cosmopolitan radical, doesn’t feel any allegiance to a particular identity, but instead translates the universal humanist concerns of Judaism and the anti-ethnicism of Marxian ideas into the modern era.

³⁴⁰ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 20

³⁴¹ Ibid, pg. 12

³⁴² Ibid, pg. 20

³⁴³ Ibid, pg. 20

³⁴⁴ B. Turok. (2003). *Nothing But the Truth*, pg. 18

³⁴⁵ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 515

³⁴⁶ Ibid, pg. 515

One controversial Jewish radical who is well-known for his anti-Zionist sentiments is Kasrils. He believes strongly that the connection between Israel and Zionism in South Africa, which are identified as one and the same thing in this country, has limited individuals' ability to identify as Jews.³⁴⁷ "Those Jews who have made the passage from having both minds and hearts squarely in a Jewish exclusivity, from having emotional connections with Zionism you could never rationally challenge – those who have managed to cross the Rubicon tend to be people who show more of an affinity with South African culture and identification".³⁴⁸ Clearly for Kasrils, 'Jewishness' should not depend on Zionism or even religion.

Kasrils is unhappy about "the status of Palestinians and even the status of Arabs within the state of Israel ... certainly although Arabs can vote in Israel, their actual status and economic position isn't great".³⁴⁹ Kasrils states that he appreciates the diverse range of opinions in Israel that are not expressed by the Jewish community here, and that this has softened his once harsh and one-sided views of Israel that she was wrong and the people she went to war with were right.³⁵⁰ "I think one can't easily push aside the effects of the Holocaust on Jews and Israel".³⁵¹ Kasrils does however defend Israel's right to self determination, "Not that there hasn't been a lot that one can be critical of in human rights terms as well as in expansionist terms, very much so ... But, you see, one was always very suspicious of its more chauvinist-nationalist expressions, like the youth movement Betar, the movement led by Jabotinsky and later Begin which saw Israel as being on both sides of the Jordan".³⁵² Kasrils says that he accepts the international position of the United Nations Resolution of 1947.³⁵³

Therefore, despite the clear 'Jewishness' of the Jewish radicals of South Africa, these activists were universalists and concerned with the underdog everywhere. In rejecting

³⁴⁷ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 279

³⁴⁸ Ibid, pg. 279-280

³⁴⁹ Ibid, pg. 281

³⁵⁰ Ibid, pg. 282

³⁵¹ Ibid, pg. 282

³⁵² Ibid, pg. 282

³⁵³ Ibid, pg. 282

ethnicity and nationalism, they became wholly concerned with injustice to the downtrodden, and in the case of Israel, the Palestinian people.

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Chapter Four

“Is this not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?” ³⁵⁴ Isaiah 58.6-7

³⁵⁴ Cited in I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 603

Conclusion

Throughout history, Jewry has encompassed a number of radical individuals who sought to overturn the corrupt status quo of their day. Within these rebels however, is something innately 'Jewish' – in their conceptions of justice, their humanist values and ultimately, their universal concern for the underdog. The vestigial impact of the historical memory of the discrimination of their own people profoundly influenced these radicals and motivated them to revolutionary action.

Justice in the Jewish tradition is the highest moral virtue. It is upheld by two pillars, *tzedakah* and *tikkun olam*, which inform a universal concern for the suffering of others and give rise to a humanist tradition within Judaism that applies to all humanity. With the coming of modernity and the failure of the promise of Emancipation to integrate Jews as equals into society, many Jews rebelled against outward symbols of 'Jewishness' and secularized and universalized Jewish values into revolutionary ideologies. These new philosophies, such as Marxism, focused on Jewish notions of cosmopolitanism, sympathy for the underdog and the creation of a messianic utopia. These 'Non-Jewish Jews' that emerged were therefore in society but not in it and found the narrow confines of Judaism too restricting and sought to move beyond it.

This dissertation has endeavoured to illustrate the ways in which the legacy of radical 'Jewishness' played itself out in the lives of the Jewish radicals of South Africa who were immersed in the anti-apartheid struggle. The immigrant generation of radicals, such as Alexander, Podbrey and Slovo, born into the poverty of the Eastern European *shtetl* and the prejudice of the Eastern European areas, are in many ways poles apart from the generation of South African-born activists, like Adler, Kasrils and Coleman among others, who came from middle-class professional families and enjoyed the privileges of white apartheid South Africa.³⁵⁵ The radicalism of the former was stirred dramatically by their socialist surroundings and raw personal experiences of antisemitism, alienation and dislocation. The latter were touched by events around the world, such as the Holocaust

³⁵⁵ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through The Mountain*, pg. 597

and the Eichmann Trial, and came to a personal realisation, through a sympathetic identification with the oppressed, that they could not be truly free in a society where others were denied justice.³⁵⁶ Ultimately however, a continuous thread weaved itself through the lives of these radicals and drew them together was their deep commitment to the cosmopolitan and humanist values of justice, as embodied in the Jewish tradition. This was in turn the embodiment of their sense of 'Jewishness', a conception of their identity rooted in the notions of *tzedakah*, *tikkun olam* and the vestigial impact of historical memory. Together these notions acted as a 'subtle catalyst' (in Suttner's words) throughout their lives and propelled them into a world of resistance against apartheid. Suttner keenly observes that above all, the single most obvious commonality amongst these radicals was their role as 'shaker-uppers' in South African society.³⁵⁷

Emerging from a conventional Jewish childhood, with many such as Alexander and Arentsein graduating from *cheyder*, these Jews were exposed to justice in the Jewish tradition from a very early age. All these radicals imbued a strong sense of 'Jewishness', with many such as Podbrey, Hirson and Kasrils even casting their identity and social activism in the mould of the Jewish Prophets. Simultaneously infused with the world and concerns of Eastern European secular Yiddish culture and the radical world of Jewish socialism and communism, these Jews were schooled in critical thinking and universal concerns from the start. Alexander, Arenstein, Slovo and Podbrey all cite the lasting impact of antisemitism in the ghetto on their sympathy for the underdog, and even Adler, Sachs, Kasrils and others born in South Africa describe the enormous imprint the historical memory of the suffering of their parents made upon their lives.

Whether in the case of Alexander, making the parallels between antisemitism and apartheid, or like Podbrey watching her mother feed a poor black man only to be greeted by the neighbours' shock, these radicals all felt that their Jewish moral and social heritage inculcated within them a need to fight oppression. The political debates in Suttner and Turok's homes, as well as the lessons of the Holocaust which stayed with Kasrils, added

³⁵⁶ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through The Mountain*, pg. 597

³⁵⁷ Ibid, pg. 598

to the working class experience of most of these activists who took the Biblical injunction to love your fellow as yourself to heart. These radicals described in their own words a sensitivity to discrimination, linked to the radical traditions of justice within Judaism and its secularised counterpart in the form of Marxist theory, that obliged them to act against apartheid. The historical awareness of the dehumanisation of the Jews was the fertile soil in which the conviction that prejudice should be challenged emerged.

This obligation was based on a secular understanding of justice in Judaism, expressed largely as Marxist and radical theory in modern times, which was informed by a cosmopolitanism or universal concern for struggles non-Jewish. As evinced by Alexander's refusal to debate the Balfour Declaration at a school function, or at Slovo's empathy to Palestinians, this feeling of obligation was rooted in, and in turn deepened an ambiguous attitude towards the State of Israel and Zionism, or Jewish nationalism. As radicals, these Jews stood against ethnic particularism and therefore the notion of a Jewish state; but many, such as Podbrey, retained sufficient 'Jewishness' to feel some links to Israel. Kasrils and others note the tension between the particular and the universal within Jewish identity and all looked to Marxism as a means of social action. Alexander argued against taking a particular interest in Israel over other countries and nations, claiming that she 'belonged to the world', whilst Podbrey saw socialism or justice for all as the logical conclusion of Jewish teachings. She drew similarities between obedience to a community of faith and the Communist family.

It has been argued that these 'non-Jewish Jews' embodied the Jewish tradition in which words become actions. Rather than disowning their 'Jewishness', they brought Jewish values to a higher fulfilment by extending notions of justice beyond the parochial. If being Jewish, as Suttner asserts, "means being compassionate and having the willingness to nurture and create", many of the 'non-Jewish Jews' in this thesis were in fact Jews in the deepest Talmudic sense.

Appendix of South African Jewish Radicals

Ray Alexander

Ray Alexander was born in 1913 and arrived in South Africa in November 1929.³⁵⁸ As a member of the Communist Party of South Africa she was immersed in trade union activity, most notably with the militant and successful Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU) founded in 1941. Alexander also helped to found the Federation of South African Women in 1954.³⁵⁹ Alexander went into exile in Zambia in 1965 and was one of the first exiles to return in 1990.³⁶⁰

Pauline Podbrey

Pauline Podbrey was born in Kovna, Lithuania and moved with her family to South Africa in 1933.³⁶¹ Podbrey set out in search of the Communist Party at age sixteen, and joined its ranks in Durban. In 1950 the couple moved to Cape Town but left the country for Britain a year later after the passing of the Suppression of Communism Act.³⁶² After settling in Budapest, Hungary, Podbrey grew disillusioned with Stalinism and left the Party and moved to London in 1954.³⁶³ Podbrey returned to Cape Town in 1990.³⁶⁴

Joe Slovo

Joe Slovo joined the Communist League in the early 1940s, marrying activist Ruth First in 1949.³⁶⁵ Slovo became a central member of the Communist Party of South Africa and a founder member of the white Congress of Democrats. Banned in 1954 from political work, Slovo became Chief of Staff of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), the ANC's military wing. He was also the first white person to serve on the ANC's national executive and eventually rose to general secretary of the South African Communist Party in 1986.³⁶⁶

³⁵⁸ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, drawing on page 23

³⁵⁹ Ibid, pg. 23

³⁶⁰ Ibid, pg. 23

³⁶¹ Ibid, drawing on page 49

³⁶² Ibid, pg. 49

³⁶³ Ibid, pg. 49

³⁶⁴ Ibid, pg. 49

³⁶⁵ Ibid, pg. 221

³⁶⁶ Ibid, pg. 223

After the unbanning of the ANC, Slovo played a crucial role at Codesa and suggested the inclusion of a sunset clause in the negotiations, ultimately leading to a government of national unity.³⁶⁷ Slovo passed away from cancer in January 1995.

Rowley Arenstein

Rowley Israel Arenstein was born in Ermelo, Transvaal in 1918 and joined the Communist Party of South Africa in 1938.³⁶⁸ Arenstein was sent to Durban to organise sugar workers. Whilst there, he practised as an attorney, undertaking much political work. Despite being detained in 1960, Arenstein worked closely with the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), the ANC, and legally represented the Pondo Movement and in the 'Natal version' of the Rivonia Trials.³⁶⁹ Arenstein was unorthodox even in his Marxism, and was expelled from the SACP as he opposed the armed struggle and sided with the Maoists in the Sino-Russian split.³⁷⁰ Arenstein grew close to the Inkatha Freedom Party in later years and died on 4th May 1996.³⁷¹

Baruch Hirson

Baruch Hirson was born on in Johannesburg 19th December 1921. Working as a political organiser for the Workers International League, Hirson was involved in the Congress of Democrats which he ultimately left to form the Socialist League of Africa.³⁷² Hirson was an active member of the African Resistance Movement, the anti-apartheid sabotage group, and was arrested and detained for nine years in 1964.³⁷³ In 1973, Hirson and his family went into exile in London.³⁷⁴

Albie Sachs

Albie Sachs was born in 1935 in South Africa, and currently serves as a Justice on the Constitutional Court. A lawyer by profession, he is also a well-known writer and

³⁶⁷ I. Suttner. (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 223

³⁶⁸ Ibid, pg. 371

³⁶⁹ Ibid, pg. 371

³⁷⁰ Ibid, pg. 372

³⁷¹ Ibid, pg. 372

³⁷² T. Lodge. (1995). 'Foreword', pg. ix

³⁷³ Ibid, pg. ix

³⁷⁴ Ibid, pg. ix

academic.³⁷⁵ After being detained for 168 days in 1963, Sachs went to live in Mozambique where he worked for the Department of Justice. After spending much time recovering from an attempted assassination by agents of the South African government in 1988, Sachs returned to South Africa with the ANC's unbanning.³⁷⁶

Ben Turok

Ben Turok is a current South African member of parliament and a former leading member of the South African Congress of Democrats.³⁷⁷ Born in Latvia in 1927, Turok arrived with his family in South Africa in 1934. In 1953 he joined the South African Congress of Democrats.³⁷⁸ Turok was also involved in the Congress of the People and was arrested in the Treason Trial of 1956. Turok went underground in 1960 but was caught and sentenced to three years in prison in 1962 under the Explosives Act.³⁷⁹ Turok went into exile and after arriving in Britain, he joined the faculty of London's Open University. Turok currently works as the director of the Institute for African alternatives.³⁸⁰

Taffy Adler

Adler was greatly involved in the formation and consolidation of the black trade union movements of the 1970s and 80s, specifically playing a role in organising, negotiating and policy-making.³⁸¹ Adler has been both the CEO of the Land Investment Trust and the Johannesburg Housing Company, and prior to the South African transition to democracy he served as the convenor of the National Housing Forum's Subsidy Task Team.³⁸²

³⁷⁵ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 343

³⁷⁶ Ibid, pg. 343

³⁷⁷ *Ben Turok*. Found at: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/bios/turok.b.htm>, accessed on 01/ 11/07

³⁷⁸ Ibid

³⁷⁹ Ibid

³⁸⁰ Ibid

³⁸¹ Ibid

³⁸² Ibid

Ronnie Kasrils

Ronnie Kasrils was born on November 15th 1938, at a time when South Africa was moving towards “grand apartheid”.³⁸³ Kasrils joined the South African Communist party in 1961.³⁸⁴ He spent 27 years in exile, leaving South Africa in 1963 after taking part in various sabotage activities.³⁸⁵ As the head of military intelligence for the ANC’s military wing *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, Kasrils spent time most notably in the ANC’s Angolan training campus and returned to South Africa whilst working on Operation Vula.³⁸⁶ After working in the country underground, he was granted immunity in 1991 and went on to become the Minister of Defence and Intelligence in post-apartheid South Africa.³⁸⁷

Raymond Suttner

Raymond Suttner served on the National Executive Committee of the ANC and the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party (SACP), and holds an important position in the Foreign Affairs department.³⁸⁸ From 1971 to 1975 Suttner worked underground for both the ANC and SACP, and in 1975 he was imprisoned for seven and a half years under the Suppression of Communism Act.³⁸⁹ Suttner was also detained in 1986 under the State of Emergency.³⁹⁰

³⁸³ I. Suttner, (1997). *Cutting Through the Mountain*, pg. 267

³⁸⁴ Ibid. pg. 267

³⁸⁵ Ibid. pg. 267

³⁸⁶ Ibid. pg. 267

³⁸⁷ Ibid. pg. 267

³⁸⁸ Ibid. pg. 497

³⁸⁹ Ibid. pg. 497

³⁹⁰ Ibid. pg. 497

Glossary

Bar mitzvah (Hebrew) – ‘son of the commandments’, rite of passage ceremony.

Bocher (Hebrew) – young man.

Cheyder (Hebrew) – a religious school.

Chuppah (Hebrew) – the wedding canopy.

Habonim (Hebrew) – ‘the Builders’, a leftist Zionist youth movement.

Kaddish (Hebrew) – prayer for the dead.

Kibbutz (Hebrew) – socialist collectives in Israel.

Landsleitman (Yiddish) – fellow countrymen from the ‘Old World’.

Mikvah (Hebrew) – ritual bath.

Paysach/ Pesach (Hebrew) – holiday of Passover.

Schvartzers (Yiddish) – black people.

Seder (Hebrew) – ‘order’, the name given to the meal at Pesach.

Shoftim (Hebrew) – Judges.

Shtetl (Yiddish) – small Jewish village, often in the Pale of Settlement, Russia.

Shul (Yiddish) – synagogue.

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